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# The Media and Meaning

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# The Media and Meaning

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# COMMENT

If familiarity were the same thing as understanding, it would be supererogatory to raise the question of what the media mean. Nothing is more generally familiar in our time, nothing deals more consistently with the familiar, and nothing familiarizes masses of men more rapidly with certain classes of events. Surely it should be enough for us to acknowledge that the media mean what they say on the subjects they process and disseminate.

But familiarity is not, in all respects, at least, even an approximation of understanding, and in some respects we are forced by experience to acknowledge it can frustrate understanding, blocking even the recognition of events taking place under our noses. By some distressing paradox, familiarity breeds estrangement. The most constant light of revelation or exposure desensitizes the organism to both radiance and gloom.

When the commuter in transit between dream and the routine of his employment turns on the car radio and dials across the bands, he will recognize not only familiar signals but that the thump of music and the theme of voices is essentially identical from all stations. Moreover, it is the sound of yesterday and the day before. The commuter might—perhaps he must—entertain the fancy that the mechanical reproduction of music and speech sounds like yesterday because it *is* yesterday and tomorrow and tomorrow insofar as we are intended to understand them. The speakers and musicians are undeniably human and familiarized to a numbing power, but they seem to exist in an artifice or counterfeit of time in which nothing ripens because nothing can. And if they be human like us, then surely we must share with them that alternative time consisting in an apparently infinite repetition of the same programmed hours. But to register the sense of eerie tension between the temporality of natural existence and that mechanically idealized by media technology may be to find the peephole needful to understanding the reality of change wrought by the media.

Things as they are, wrote Wallace Stevens, are changed upon the blue guitar. Tune the instrument differently and you get different changes, languages at least partly incompatible with one another, requiring at least some common modalities for translation if we are to stabilize meaning in the flux.

"The dead do not know they have died," the Greeks said, skirmishing with the limits of understanding by play with the ambiguities of this semantic puzzle. To borrow the form of the conundrum, we may say that Statistical Man (for whom media programs are programmed) does not know he has evolved from Industrial Man, though he is of the statistical persuasion that he evolved somewhat more remotely from the Ape. We cannot say with clarity, in the language now available, when or how "we" became the media's "we," suffering identity change as we were disengaged from former collectivities of consciousness and were incorporated in the novelty emerging from the ingenuity of the species. Still (I suppose) for most of us there persists an august and uneasy sense of doubleness, as if we were each both Gulliver and Lilliputian in a kingdom claimable by neither. Now when we see ourselves in Gulliverian aspect we seem monstrous, or at least unassimilable, in our Lilliputian aspect rather pitiable but safely assimilated in the complacencies of a public no longer even dependent on massive populations but stabilized by the techniques of the media.

Well, from the hand of God or Nature, we are the Gulliverian species, and if we have been reincorporated as Lilliputians, it is by the mechanized idealization of the intelligible world by the media; (*idealization* in the more perilous sense of the term, to be sure, a disengagement of language from the tests of immediate sense perception and impassioned sentiment, a situation where "concreteness" and "specificity" are terms of idealized usage, estranged from root meanings, honored by abuse, the more abused the more honored.)

Media language generally perpetuates the linguistic forms of ordinary language, but *usage* (the central concept in considering the meaning of language) is most certainly changed. *Frequency* is a determinant in usage, and nothing is more obvious than that the desiccated metaphor *broadcast* correctly implies a frequency that has vastly accelerated shifts in usage. In the meanwhile the use of "usage" in scholarly or philosophical colloquia has ignominiously fallen behind the eventuality. No wonder if confusion is compounded or if the unassimilable Gulliver wishes for the equivalent of a Rosetta stone so he could just once understand the meaning of what Dan Rather is saying with such flair and confidence in a language overwhelmingly familiar in its mystification.

In his book *Sense and Sensibilia* epistemologist J. L. Austin uproots some of the weedy language of idealist philosophy by demonstrating that ordinary language contains more ambiguity, precision, and precision in ambiguity than the coinages contrived by philosophers to make up for its presumed deficiencies. He calls the replacement of terms long stabilized by the common experience of the race an abuse and says, "You can not abuse ordinary language without paying for it." The kicker is in the adjective. What he means by *ordinary* is not that familiarized more and more by extensive media usage. He is drawing on the root sense of the word *ordinary*, with its vital implication that language orders experience and expresses a perceived order, leading to consequences of ordinate behavior, ordinate love or fear, and an ordinate communion with one's fellows.

What he stops short of considering—and who would not quail before the mystery and dread of the enigma?—is that abused language transforms the reality and the role of the species in nature, so that it becomes ordinary by changing



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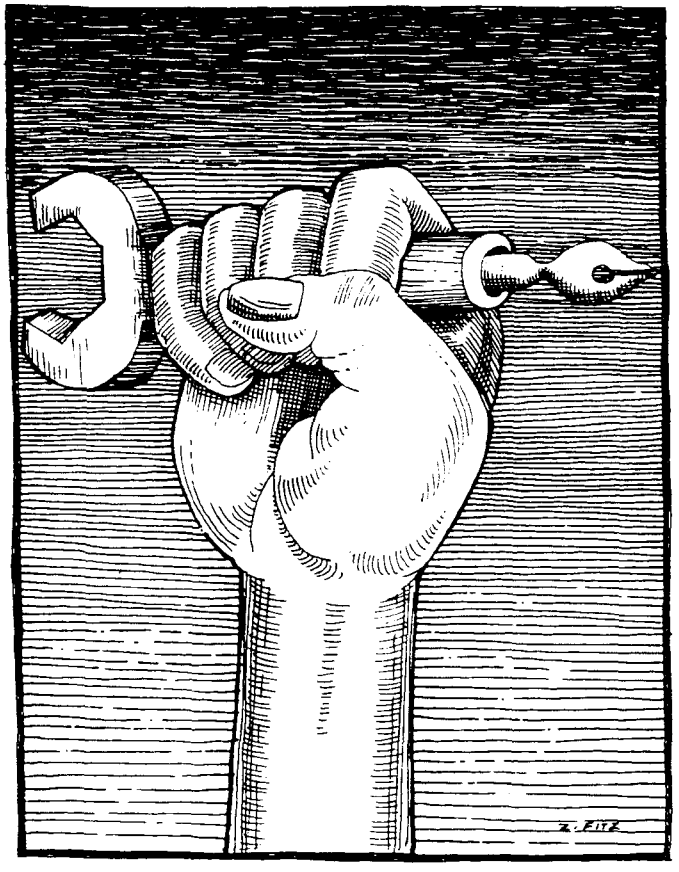
what is ordinate for the race. And what if the real purpose of the media—its fundamental meaning, if you like—were not enlightenment but crowd control in an environment conditioned overwhelmingly by technologies of transportation, food production, consumption, and housing? Consider as symptomatic the media exploitation of the laugh machine. Heaven-sent laughter, with its traditional powers to console



and delight has also traditionally been to serve as social regulator, the guardian of taboos and their assassin in the successions of history. Denatured laughter, prescribed by some decades of training with the TV laugh machine, eliminates the parochialism engendered by class, race, and religion, and grants a freedom of social passage to the denatured scion of a stock biased by one set or another of historic circumstances.

Crowd control is properly the business of de jure governments, which require in peacetime that the population will be productive and acquiescent, in wartime that it will endure or perpetrate any enormity. Between the two World Wars it was widely believed that the social regulation delegated to modern media would serve the political state. In the continuing archaism of communist governments, this appears to be the case. But in the West, shepherded by media monopolies based in the U.S., the media have shown themselves a force majeure without a nominal political master, maintaining what media spokesmen call an "adversary relationship" to constitutionally designated authorities. Perhaps we do not have a media-controlled government, though the laughter of Norman Lear and the Archie Bunker laugh machine drastically regulates the three nominal bodies. It is within the power—incrementally established over the last decades—of the media to revise the whole social contract by modification of language through unexamined shifts in usage. The nub of the matter was put ingenuously but tellingly by one TV commentator I heard recently who said, "The question in this election year is, what kind of Constitution *do we want ours to be?*" (Since there are no italics on the tube, nor need be, the italics are mine. I italicize to call attention to the words offering—surely desirable!—freedom of choice for the ordinary "is it" the Supreme Court is hired to define.) The media will poll the population and report what kind of Constitution is wanted and—presto, changeo—the slide over from de jure to de jure will be accomplished by those in de facto control. Why bother with antiquated means of amending the Constitution? The actual alteration, while surely of historic significance, is not among the classes of event the media are constituted to bring into the light.

Highly visible themselves, the media have rendered invisible and unspeakable (if not unthinkable) the powers of usurpation and greed that have emerged in the new enclaves of the technological collectivity. More than church or state in our time, the media wage an indefatigable crusade against bigotry, injustice, insensitivity, discrimination, war, ignorance, racism, sexism, agism, etc. It is anybody's guess—uninformed, of course, or informed only by voices from the past chanting likelihood—that these things flourish as never before.

Have not the friends of Fred Friendly and the off-camera sponsors of Dan Rather vanquished even the taints of bigotry and hypocrisy that flawed the slave-owning authors of the Constitution?

Maybe not.

As Auden saw it once:

> The vanquished powers were glad
> To be invisible and free; without remorse
> Struck down the sons who strayed into their course,
> And ravished the daughters, and drove the fathers mad.

*—R. V. Cassill*

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# Ideologues in Search of a Faith

**Paul Hollander: *The Many Faces of Socialism: Comparative Sociology and Politics;* Transaction Books; New Brunswick, NJ.**

**Louis Dupré: *Marx's Social Critique of Culture;* Yale University Press; New Haven, CT.**

**by Lee Congdon**

Most contemporary intellectuals reject Hilaire Belloc's claim that the West must return to Christianity if it is to survive as a civilization. In their view, we live in an enlightened and disenchanted world that has left behind forever the integral but innocent and uncritical Age of Faith. And as if to lend support to their conviction, several spokesmen of the Church have sought to accommodate that venerable institution to new, secular imperatives. And yet, as Paul Hollander argues so convincingly, the longing for an all-embracing purpose and meaning is as deep as it ever was—and not merely in untutored circles. This unsatisfied hunger, he maintains, "constitutes one of the most often overlooked attributes of intellectuals." Now, however, most *clercs* concentrate their hopes on the creation of an earthly paradise, almost always equated with some variety of "socialism."

Comprised of a series of essays written over the past 20 years, *The Many Faces of Socialism* enlarges upon several of the themes that Hollander explored in *Political Pilgrims,* his superb study of Western travelers to the Soviet Union, China, and Cuba. Living in the secular and seemingly meaningless world that they themselves did so much to create, Western intellectuals have projected their personal sense of loss and their discontent onto the societies of which they are members. So common is this occurrence that to be an intellectual is now widely understood to be an adversary of all things Western. The West, our advanced thinkers repeatedly state, is unworthy of our respect because it is individualistic, imperialistic, and materialistic. They single out the United States as a peculiarly unjust and oppressive nation, one, moreover, that has mastered the arts of deception and concealment. The intellectuals view it as their calling to expose the iniquitous System by means of painstaking critical analysis and, if need be, by active provocation.

But, at the same time that these no-nonsense intellectuals subject American society to unsparing criticism and advertise their allegiance to the highest moral standards, they exhibit a remarkable generosity when they turn their attention to societies that proclaim a commitment to socialism. Before our eyes, stern social critics metamorphose into students of history eager to suspend moral judgment. While conceding that the Soviet Union possesses an awesome military arsenal, they recall World War II and maintain that the Russians have every reason to feel threatened. Without denying that the Soviet government is dictatorial, they insist that we consider the long Mongol occupation and the ruthlessness of czars such as Ivan the Terrible. Additionally, they remind us that the Chinese are accustomed to warlords and tyrants and the Cubans to dictators and Yankee imperialists. Naturally, then, any effort to apply to socialist governments and societies the kind of social criticism that has done so much to erode Western self-confidence would be unfair and unfitting; it would betray a shocking disregard for historical circumstances.

Yet it is no accident, as the Marxists are wont to say, that apologists are disinclined to examine tyrannical regimes too closely. As Hollander observes, empirical investigations of self-styled Marxist societies are rare precisely because they serve to undermine the false constructions of reality in which so much personal capital has been invested. Very little effort, for example, has been expended in comparing Soviet and American societies in a detailed and systematic manner. To be sure, most intellectuals have long since stopped praising the U.S.S.R. unreservedly, preferring to speak generally of a growing "convergence" between the world's two superpowers. By discussing the U.S.S.R. *and* the U.S. within the context of technological modernization, the former is made to seem no worse, if no better, than the latter: "We have McCarthyism and racism; they have Stalinism and the purges."

When it comes to Marxist societies that continue to excite the radical imagination, intellectuals do not hesitate to make large, if vague, claims. Almost invariably, their utopias-in-the-making—Cuba, Vietnam, Mozambique—are described as Caring, Authentic, Simple, and Communal. Unlike the individualistic West, these countries are said to be energized by a genuine sense of "community." Never, of course, do those who advance propositions of this sort subject them to the kind of scrutiny that is reserved for any affirmative depiction, however qualified, of American society. And when the evidence of failure and evil can no longer be disregarded or explained away, intellectuals simply transfer their loyalties; most recently, it is the Sandinistas who are creating a truly human community.

Those who prefer their utopias straight, without so much as a chaser of reality, are more partial to failed revolutions or revolutions in progress. One has only to think of the aura that surrounds "republican" Spain and Allende's Chile; a similar mystique attaches to the Salvadoran guerrillas, not yet tainted by power. Of course, the most fastidious visionaries refuse to take *any* chances (or responsibility), choosing instead to

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construct wholly imaginary alternatives to existing or would-be governments. "Some of us," Irving Howe wrote recently, "had hoped during the mid-fifties for the emergence of a Vietnamese 'third force,' capable of rallying the people through land reform in the countryside and democratization in the cities. This now appears to have been a vain hope: there simply were no political forces strong or coherent enough to move in this direction."

Because the celebration of regimes that describe themselves as socialist is rooted in religious impulses, enthusiasm tends to wane when the "revolution" begins to discourage turmoil and removes utopia from its immediate agenda. Unlike Lenin and Stalin, for example, Khrushchev and Brezhnev inspired little excitement in the West and those who enthused over the intellectual Mao and who greeted China's "Cultural Revolution" as a heartening sign of renewed ideological militancy are bored to distraction by today's less fevered leaders, unimaginative apparatchiks who do business with the wicked and reactionary Americans.

Hollander is very much aware of this syndrome. Reflecting on a recent visit to Hungary, the land of his birth, he suggests that János Kádár's "goulash communism," for all its inadequacies, represents a significant improvement over the Stalinism that he knew as a child. Nevertheless,

> this is not a model of socialism to gladden the hearts of those Western intellectuals who continue to yearn for a sense of purpose, community, and direction emanating from some infallible belief system or social organization. . . . The New Socialist Man has not been born and bred in Hungary, but some attributes of the old, nonsocialist man have certainly survived with many of their redeeming imperfections.

It is, in fact, astonishing that many leftists, including some Hungarian émigrés and Budapest dissidents (one thinks of the talented György Konrád) take a dim view of Kádár's Hungary, in spite of the fact that it is, by any measure, the most free of the Soviet-dominated lands. The principal objection to contemporary Hungarian society seems to be that it is becoming too Western—it lacks any cosmic purpose and is overly concerned with material betterment. One no longer hears much talk about building a new world.

In the light of Hollander's thoughtful analysis of leftist intellectuals, it should not be surprising that so many of them have made their careers as social critics. Indeed, "being a social critic in the United States has become in some ways the best of all possible worlds, one which

can combine idealism with security, idealism with material and status rewards, passion with safety, and political commitment with group support." Louis Dupré is a case in point. As Professor of the Philosophy of Religion at Yale, he is secure and rewarded, but he is also very much impressed by Marx's social critique of Western culture and eager to hone its cutting edge. He is typical too in his substitution of secular utopianism for Christian hope.

If Dupré were not a member of the Yale faculty, I doubt that this work would have been published by the Yale University Press. Though competent, the study offers little that is original and it borrows uncritically from the work of such insignificant and tiresome ideologues as Bertell Ollman and Ernest Mandel. At a more sophisticated level, Dupré is indebted to Georg Lukács and to the members of the Frankfurt School. And although he may not be aware of it, his ideas concerning the relationship between society and economy replicate those of Karl Polanyi. Nevertheless, he has persuaded himself and his editors that he has uncovered something new by reexamining Marx's writings.

According to Dupré, Marx's unique contribution was his analysis of cultural disintegration and his proposal for forging a new unity. The learned revolutionary was not a confused and simpleminded economic determinist, but a sophisticated critic and master of the dialectic. True, Marx did say in *The German Ideology* that high culture—the superstructure—is merely a function of the social-economic base on which it rests, but that, Dupré assures us, should not be taken too seriously. What Marx *really* meant was that there is a subtle, dialectical relationship between base and superstructure in which each term affects the other. On this reading, Marxism is a probing (organic-dialectic) method of interpretation, not a crude (architectural-causal) ideology.

The problem that the dialectic method was designed to uncover and to solve is, in Dupré's judgment, the "reification of modern culture." Just as man is separated from his fellows and from himself by the alienating structures of capitalism, so modern culture is isolated from its socioeconomic base, severed from its roots in human labor. If, therefore, culture is ever again to be humane and meaningful, it must be reunited with all of man's productive activity; theory and praxis must become inseparable and correlative aspects of a new whole. Dupré puts it this way: "Each



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[theory and praxis] presents one aspect of a total, integrally human activity and, as such, remains *subordinate to the whole.*" It was Marx's genius to have recognized the crucial importance of this mutual dependence and ultimate reconciliation.

For all his attitude of reverence, however, Dupré is too intelligent and scrupulous to ignore Marx's manifest lapses and contradictions. Though he would like to acquit the author of *Das Kapital* of the reductive charge, he concedes—and given his argument it is a major concession—that Marx never "reconciled the architectural-causal interpretation of culture with the more fundamental organic-dialectic one." Moreover, he points out that Marx, for all his vaunted sense of history, continued to assume the unchanging priority of economic factors. Perhaps most important, he observes that despite Marx's protestations, the Marxian dialectic is shot through with teleological assumptions—and that it must be if history is to be regarded as anything more than random movement. In the final analysis, then, Dupré does not deny that there exists a utopian element in Marx's work; on the contrary, he insists that it is precisely this ingredient that "deserves serious consideration." Thus, what began as a defense of a hermeneutic method, ends, as it often does, with a declaration of faith.

Like that of so many other admirers of Marx, Dupré's critical vision is blurred by his dizzying encounter with the dialectic. Everywhere he sees things that are transformed into their opposite and influences that are at once mutual and one-directional. Moreover, despite incessant talk of a "reintegrated" culture, he leaves us largely in the dark about its exact nature. What does it mean, for example, to say that in a unified culture no productive activity "is allowed to descend to the low level of 'merely making a living' and none, however speculative or artistic, remains detached from economic productivity"? Does this mean, as the Chinese and Cubans seem to think, that writers and artists should labor in the fields several months each year? Or that workers should write novels and be compelled to attend the ballet? Or that society should rank the composition of the Ninth Symphony no higher than the manufacture of shoes? Dupré never essays to answer this question.

Whatever his limitations, however, Dupré is not mistaken about the fragmented character of modern culture. We *are* in the midst of a profound cultural crisis, the seeds of which were sown in the great era of modernism that is now past. The recognition that "things fall apart" and that "the centre cannot hold" could not long, of itself, sustain our culture, for as Belloc knew, the fate of the West is inseparable from that of historic Christianity. In his reflections on the unity of Western culture, T. S. Eliot argued with his customary force and eloquence that all cultures depend on religion for their vitality and coherence, their sense of significance. He did not say, of course, that all Westerners must be communicants. An individual "may not believe that the Christian Faith is true, and yet what he says, and makes, and does, will all spring out of his heritage of Christian culture and depend upon that culture for its meaning. Only a Christian culture could have produced a Voltaire or a Nietzsche." Or, I might add, a Marx. Western culture's present malaise is not, that is to say, the consequence of its alienation from economic production, but of its neglect of its Christian sources. Whether or not we are Christians by personal conviction, we must begin again to draw upon those vast and rich sources if we are not finally to be overtaken by barbarism. No economic organization and no political system can create for us the context of meaning that Christianity has provided for almost two millennia. □

# Partial Prognoses

**Paul Fussell: *Class: A Guide Through the American Status System;* Summit Books; New York.**

**by Daniel J. O'Neil**

Paul Fussell has written an interesting entertainment that examines the American class structure. It is basically descriptive and impressionistic and espouses no cause. It is filled with keen insights and amusing anecdotes and is consequently a relaxing, nontaxing book. In essence, it meshes with a vast Western literature—both scholarly and pedestrian—that enthrones class as *the* object of study.

Much of 20th-century scholarship involves a preoccupation with class. This is perhaps the legacy of Karl Marx, who viewed class as the Rosetta stone that enabled historical interpretation and prediction. Marxist ideology sees history as a panorama of class struggle. History unfolds in a progressive pattern through class conflict; there is movement from one dominating class to another until the chain is broken. The industrial proletariat is, of course, the messianic class that is destined to triumph. Hence, according to Marxists, to focus on class—class interests, class control, class exploitation, class conspiracy—is to focus on political reality. Other considerations involve the superficial or mere "superstructure." To concentrate primarily on nation or culture is but to demonstrate one's naiveté. Paradoxically, once the Marxist-Leninists seize power in a state and consolidate their control, they seldom tolerate a class critique of the new establishment. How many leaders of the contemporary communist world stem

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from the proletariat? More than 60 years after the Russian Revolution, how many sons of the proletariat have joined the "new class"? Class interpretation of reality, like the appeal of Marxist ideology, seems to thrive only outside the Marxist-Leninist sphere of control.

Why have so many interpreters of politics succumbed to the obsession with class? Social scientists in the West have been wedded to class interpretation for reasons in addition to the influence of Marx. The values of most Western interpreters are disproportionately those of the Enlightenment. There is confidence in the intelligibility rather than the mystery, ambiguity, or amorphous nature of objective reality. There is a faith in human universality that gives one's limited experience a transcendent meaning. The emphasis is upon reason, science, progress, and secularity. The eventual hope is to enable the social sciences to emulate the physical sciences by discerning laws or patterns of human behavior and thus move toward prediction. Consequently, the Marxist dogma of class primacy offers a temptation since it suggests intelligibility and universality, and simplifies, facilitates quantification, and promises prediction. Class becomes a key offering gnostic-wisdom to the initiated.

Often a scholar's academic fortunes are linked with his success in discerning regularities in human behavior. To bestow one's name upon a theory or even a hypothesis is an envied coup. There is, of course, an element of public relations in all of this, since perceiving a "law" is not enough. One must convince one's peers of its value. Ideally, one would inspire a following of disciples. Veneration of Marxist dogma helps achieve this end as it not only provides a tool for conjuring regularities in human behavior, but also links the ambitious scholar with a school enjoying academic credence.

The intellectuals who interpret the political realm are often "marginal" men. Their academic training estranges them from traditionality. Often their lives are spent in academic seminaries—first as students, later as teachers and researchers. They are shielded by an academic ethos that sets them apart from the

surrounding world and which often becomes more important than their inherited culture. Basically secular, it tends to deemphasize the traditional loyalties to turf, family, ethnicity, and religion. It privatizes these primordial loyalties and, further, suggests that they are very secondary or even an embarrassment destined to oblivion. Perceiving the world in terms of this acquired academic value system, the intellectual often finds it difficult to appreciate the force of tradition. The obvious and rational interpretation of many contemporary events must consequently be rejected for the esoteric. The end result is that important traditional concerns and loyalties that might serve as counterweights to class and class obsession are deemphasized or eliminated. Hence, the intellectual finds it difficult to understand and appreciate persons motivated differently than himself.

In addition to the class-oriented academics, there are aspiring politicians who have a vested interest in redefining politics. It serves their objective to eliminate cultural factors from political relevance. Ambitious persons who seek power but who are outside the cultural mainstream must redirect the political focus, and emphasizing class is a way to do it. A Greek atheist, seeking power, obviously must center attention on something other than Greek nationalism defined religiously. An Arab Christian will have little political future in an Islamic Republic. An Israeli Gentile will be unable to maneuver in Zionist politics. Each of these persons can aspire to political success only through redefining politics away from the cultural. *Class* offers such an opportunity. The formula is often employed: relegate tribe, ethnicity, religion, etc. to the private realm or make them irrelevant; appeal to those believed economically exploited. (Of course, the primordial loyalties will inevitably return.)

Despite its ubiquity, there are significant problems with class interpretations. Historically, class obsession is but a remnant of the 19th-century European search for *one* factor that would explain reality. Some opted for race, some geography, and others for class. The search was parochial in its assumption and its application. There are serious empirical problems associated with class interpretation. Generally, class is not a meaningful concept for the average person. Only the occasional eccentric identifies emotionally with class. Few people, even in the most developed societies, have a clear concept of their own class. Most Westerners, their income notwithstanding, claim middle-class status. Despite generations of Marxist polemic, there is no international class loyalty. During the two World Wars, nationalism proved stronger than class; the workers of each country fought for the national flag. During World War II, Stalin aroused the Russian masses in the name of Holy Mother Russia and in opposition to Western aggression; he conveniently closeted the classist ideology. Today, Marxist-Leninist movements reap success only when they cloak themselves in nationalism.



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They are especially formidable when they forge a united front that monopolizes the symbols of nationalism, resists a foreign foe, and promises both democracy and socioeconomic reform.

Despite the Marxist-Leninist claim for class, class-oriented cultures are hard to locate. A comparison of the high culture inspired by love of religion and love of nation with the lack of a class-inspired culture is all-revealing. Can one discern an art, music, poetry, literature, and architecture inspired by love of the proletariat? Haven't the Marxist-Leninist cultural feats been mainly plagiarized? High culture in Eastern Europe is based on past capital, while the genuinely creative defect in ever-increasing numbers.

An interesting arena of distortion due to class obsession is the vast field of religion. So much in the contemporary world relating to or inspired by religion is overlooked, unappreciated, or misinterpreted. Often, the religious element is interpreted away. The intellectual's secular focus has cost him dearly in understanding the nonsecular environment. Nineteenth-century predictions concerning the withering away of the spirit have failed to materialize except in the daydreams of the literati. The view of religion as a conservative/reactionary force can be entertained only by the most dogmatic.

Classist orientation and expectations meant that most social scientists were surprised by the Western Europe that emerged from the World War II trauma. Few of them had predicted the unprecedented rise of Christian Democratic parties throughout the continent and their vital role in creating the European Economic Community; moreover, they were unable to understand it. Few realize even today that religious practice has been as strong a determinant of voting behavior as class in France, West Germany, and Italy. How can one understand Latin American politics or culture without a knowledge of the Latin American religious tradition? Today, the Church supports a vast system that encompasses education, media, political parties, and interest groups. Despite the excessive media coverage, "liberation theology" does not represent the totality of the Latin American religious experience, nor is it the novel break with tradition that is contended. Those who carry on about liberation theology should be informed that the two most prominent revolutionaries of the 1810 Mexican Revolution—Hidalgo and Morelos—were priests.

Throughout Eastern Europe one can find impressive evidence that indicates that creative persons are drawn to religion more than they are to class relations. Numerous dissenters have rallied to the Church despite—or perhaps because of—the penalties involved. Dialectical materialism inspires, essentially, the careerists. Groups that were estranged from their religious tradition during the 19th century have come to a new appreciation of that tradition due to their experience with the secular alternative. Is it accidental that Russia's two greatest 20th-century novelists—Pasternak and Solzhenitsyn—are religious men? Can one disentangle Solidarity and the Polish Renaissance from Catholicism?

Even in the United States the impact of religion is not without significance—media noncoverage notwithstanding. Few secular intellectuals have appreciated the role of churches in the civil rights, antipoverty, and peace efforts. Who predicted the decline of "mainstream" Protestantism and the rise of fundamentalism? Who clearly understands the role of fundamentalism in presidential politics? These and other questions remain to be answered.

I'm not suggesting that religion replace class as our key to understanding, but simply pointing out the limitations of interpretations based solely on class. Class is merely part of human reality—and certainly not the most important one. □

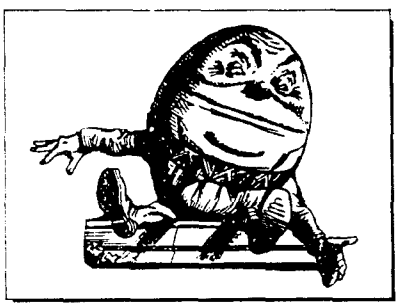
## LIBERAL CULTURE

### *The Maven Syndrome*

John Kenneth Galbraith, the guru of mavens (that is, the *Besserwissers*, as German tongue, centuries ago, had pinned down the phenomenon with an unexpected precision), in *Parade*, a Sunday magazine and the chief organ of liberal micrology that's famous for measuring humans with the help of their underwear:

> Our most marked political error lies in exaggerating the role of political ideology and minimizing that of hard, insouciant reality. Conservatives, with their hope of recovering a simple, idealized past, are the most vulnerable, but those with glowing utopian visions of the left are far from exempt.

Prof. Galbraith generally has but a very faint idea of what he is writing about. One glimpse into any conservative journal



would teach him that the modern American conservative does not give a damn for a simple, idealized past. Rather, the conservative performs an extensive, passionate critique of the insouciant reality in order to salvage the American future. But Prof. Galbraith, the quintessential *Besserwisser*, knows everything—and knows it better than anyone else—by definition, without doing any rudimentary homework. □



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# The Media as Fun-House Mirror

**Russ Braley: *Bad News: The Foreign Policy of The New York Times*; Regnery Gateway; Chicago.**

**by Herbert I. London**

The publication of Russ Braley's *Bad News* represents a landmark moment in the history of current affairs. No longer will it be possible for some enthusiastic and devoted reader of the *New York Times* to argue his position without recognizing the extent to which this newspaper has systematically colored the major events of this century. *Bad News*, a fine book, is a counterweight to a narrowly parochial perception of modern history. This is by no means a polemical work. Mr. Braley provides a selective history of major American news stories from the Hungarian uprising and Suez crisis in 1956 to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 in a factual and dispassionate manner. Occasionally the reportage is almost dry, as if the author believes that the facts speak for themselves and require no interpretation. But the cumulative effect is staggering.

What this history conclusively demonstrates is that the *New York Times* has routinely encouraged reporting of the news that supports its political orthodoxy. This orthodoxy includes: an accommodationist spirit with the Soviet Union, a resistance to the deployment of American troops abroad for any reason, an unreasoning hatred of Nixon Republicanism, a desire for retribution against any anticommunist hardliners, and an insouciant belief that any self-proclaimed revolutionary represents the indigenous "will of the people." Braley doesn't say this; he doesn't have to. The evidence speaks compellingly and the conclusion is unavoidable. The *New York Times* does not report "all the news that's fit to print"; it reports all the news that's print to fit.

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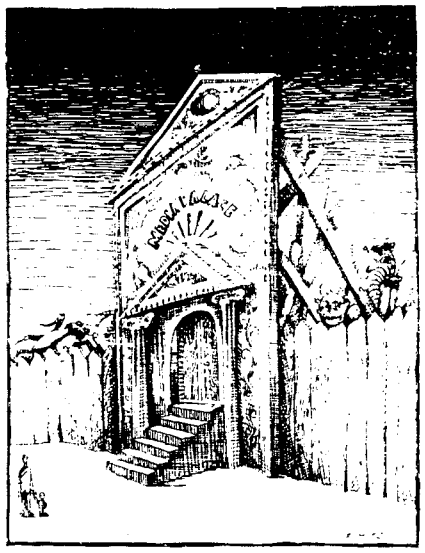
When Hungary was besieged by Soviet tanks sent to crush the modest opposition to the Kremlin's puppet government, James Reston called for "restraint" on the part of the American government and for the spontaneous "development of Titoism." When Fidel Castro represented a small contingent of doctrinaire communist rebels against



the Batista regime, Herbert Matthews wrote, "There is one fight the Cuban people will not and cannot lose, and that is the fight for freedom." So intransigent was Mr. Matthews's position that even when Castro made his formal treaty with the Soviet Union, he still proclaimed Castro's independence. There appears to be little doubt that the American government's position on Cuba was influenced as much by Matthews's editorials as by Batista's tactical errors and Castro's grandstanding for the consumption of American sympathizers.

When the communists were ensconced in power, eviscerating the last semblance of democratic institutions, Matthews wrote: "[Most Cubans] today do not want elections. The reason is that elections in the past merely meant to them the coming of corrupt politicians seeking the spoils of power." Abandoning democratic elections in Cuba was justified for Matthews, but any modification in electoral practices conducted by Diem in South Vietnam five years later was considered a tragic consequence of dictatorial rule. Here is the graphic truth about *New York Times* editorials: A left-wing government can be excused any violation of human decency and political freedom; a right-wing government must be like Caesar's wife. For the *Times* there is a dialectic at work in the world in which the competition of political ideas inevitably results in the establishment of left-leaning governments. Should those governments end up as proxies for the Soviet Union, so be it. It is little wonder that some detractors believe the ghost of Lenin lives at the *New York Times* editorial office.

The Kennedy campaign gave the newspaper its opportunity to create a knight in shining armor. So one-sided was its presentation of the Kennedy-Nixon debates that Reston wrote: "Nixon is aiming lower and concentrating on stopping bad things while Kennedy is concentrating on starting new things." Reston neglected to say that Kennedy's "new things" were the Bay of Pigs preparations and his acquiescence to the construction of the Berlin Wall. It is instructive to compare the *Times* response to Kennedy's "new things" with its recent reaction to Gary Hart's "new ideas." Our history does indeed repeat itself—as farce.

When the Soviets openly supplied Cuba with offensive missiles in 1962 Senator Keating continually attacked the do-nothing attitude of the Kennedy Administration. Once again the *Times* supported Kennedy and castigated his opponent. In an editorial that must have proved to be embarrassing to Kennedy and even to *Times* writers a year later, it was argued that "no organized combat force, no Soviet military bases, no offensive capacity" exists in Cuba. How



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could there be? The shining knight said they don't exist, ergo they don't exist. The *Times* also unabashedly rewrites contemporary history by removing from the record those statements by its friends that might prove to be embarrassing. When, for example, John Kenneth Galbraith on a diplomatic mission for the Kennedy Administration unequivocably contended that Diem must be deposed, Hedrick Smith later reported that dissatisfaction with Diem evolved over time, not that a trusted aide called for his ouster.

David Halberstam and Neil Sheehan have both admitted that they wrote reports about events in Vietnam as early as 1963 designed to persuade the American people that the war was being lost. They used the pages of the *Times* to promote their own view of reality and in the process helped to alter the course of American history. Those who didn't buy the party line about Vietnam were expunged from print whenever possible. After the celebrity status was conferred on Halberstam and Sheehan, no one at the *Times* wanted to be left out of the anti-Vietnam War reporting business. Harrison Salisbury went to observe and report on the effects of the Americans' "bombing of civilians" in North Vietnam. He toured the country with Wilfred Burchett as a guide—the same Burchett who was probably the interrogator of American prisoners of war in North Korea. Salisbury's dispatches described waitresses taking up rifles to fire at American planes and praised the unity and determination of the North Vietnamese people. At no point did he mention North Vietnamese atrocities in the south, open graves in Hue, or acts of barbarity the northern government visited upon its own people. It was open season on the Johnson Administration and the way into the hearts of the Pulitzer Prize committee was to take to the field.

In 1968 the events in Vietnam were briefly eclipsed by the Soviet bullying in Czechoslovakia. But the view of the *Times* was quite consistent. Anthony Lewis quoted the usual unnamed diplomatic source to announce that "The West can help most by remaining quiet and calm." The editorial page argued that most Czechs did not want help: "They seek to settle the conflict as a 'family affair.' It is their best chance." Can you imagine a similar comment made by *Times* editorial writers if uprisings by blacks in South Africa were to be crushed by government tanks?

Perhaps the event that had the most chilling effect on American public opinion during the Vietnam War was the account by Seymour Hersh of the My Lai massacre. Hersh compiled first- and secondhand accounts of the incident and distributed them through Dispatch News Service, a subsidiary of the radical left Institute for Policy Studies which was actively involved in spreading antigovernment disinformation about the U.S. Vietnam policy. Hersh won the 1969 Pulitzer Prize for his reporting on My Lai and wrote two internationally acclaimed books on the subject—all without his ever having seen Vietnam. As Mr. Braley notes, "the *Times* index of 1969 contains three and a half pages of fine print reference to My Lai stories, while it has only minor references to the Communist massacre of an estimated 4,800 persons, dead and presumed dead, in Hue at the same period." When, by 1973, the *Times* had secured the *Pentagon Papers* and a decision was made to leak them gradually through rewritten versions of the original documents, it was clear the newspaper had become an actively antiwar instrument. There wasn't even a pretense of objectivity. If the war should be won by the U.S. and its South Vietnamese ally, the *Times* would be lined up with the losers. The publication of the *Pentagon Papers* in direct


**In the forthcoming issue of *Chronicles of Culture:***

## The Election

"Conservatives must return to the position that certain things are immune to determination by majority vote. The government does *not* have the right to reorder people's property, wealth, or income at will or to restructure society to fit some subjective ideal. The government's duty is to protect the right of people to be unequal, as long as the methods they use are not themselves illegal within the traditional framework of law. The scope of politics must be limited if the reach of government is to be limited."

**—from "Social Placebos & Cures" by William R. Hawkins**

**ALSO**

**Opinions & Views—Commendables—Waste of Money—In Focus Perceptibles—The American Proscenium—Journalism Notables—Screen—Music—Confluences—Liberal Culture**





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defiance of government strictures was an unalloyed attack on the Nixon Administration which "could not be allowed to win or draw in the war." Two years later, the *New York Times* got what it wanted.

The triumph of the *Times* made it the Fourth Estate, a coequal member of government that was not accountable to anyone but its own officials. So powerful did its voice become that influential government officials did its bidding, including those who testified that the paper did not violate national secrets with its unauthorized release of the *Pentagon Papers*. While this view was challenged by military experts and later borne out with the tactics deployed by the North Vietnamese army in its final assault on the south (the tactics were in fact suggested in the *Pentagon Papers*), the tide of public opinion had shifted to the side of the *Times*. Many Americans were by now convinced that the military officials could not tell the truth.

Only one victory was yet to be won: the ousting of President Nixon. Although the leadership in this campaign was seized by the *Washington Post*, the *Times* was not to be outdone. The *Times*, not known for balanced reporting, entered into a game of one-upmanship with the *Post* for public attention and approbation. Nixon had acted unwisely, perhaps foolishly, but in the vise created by the *Times* and the *Post*, he was considered a threat to the continuation of the Republic. Joseph Kraft wrote, "There was a systematic effort to set up what amounts to a police state." Nothing, of course, was further from the truth. Nixon, a somewhat insecure man, was on the defensive from the outset, "placed in the bullseye of the media," as Braley puts it, and was unable to dodge the vicious, unrelenting darts that were thrown at him. That there was an inexorability to the Vietnam War-the *Pentagon Papers*-North Vietnamese victory-Watergate is made patently clear in *Bad News*.

By the mid-1970's the *Times* was urging the American people to reattach itself to the comfortable but specious position of isolationism. How could most people know this view was wrongheaded? The *Times* has the largest, if not the best, staff of foreign correspondents in the world. Those who are good reporters—and there are many—often become captives of the *Times* ideology. In the Washington bureau and the home office, John Oakes, James Reston, Tom Wicker, and Anthony Lewis hold the keys to advancement. Herbert Matthews, David Halberstam, Seymour Hersh, and Harrison Salisbury won Pulitzer Prizes and serve as the models of success. Before them it was Walter Duranty, an avowed apologist for Stalinist crimes who reported the Potemkin Villages as the new Eden, who ruled the empire on 43rd Street in Manhattan.

One cannot survive in public life and take on the paper. It is too big, influential, and close to the levers of power. The *Times* has developed a world view that suggests that people in the developing world and revolutionaries everywhere must be placated, mollified, solicited, and appeased so they won't challenge the privilege, authority, and power the paper has arrogated to itself. If the prestige of this nation is lost in the process, that is only a small price to pay for the survival and apotheosis of the *Times*.

*Bad News* makes it apparent that our nation has been routinely undermined in the pursuit of its foreign policy by media representatives who stand above the law, beyond the reach of the electorate, and on top of a self-created altar of perceived wisdom. This book may not be widely read, as it will undoubtedly receive little media exposure. It probably won't win any awards. How can it when the Book Critics Circle and the National Book Award Committee are in alliance with the extended *New York Times* family? □

# Remembrance of Trivia Past

**William Phillips: *A Partisan View: Five Decades of the Literary Life*; Stein & Day; New York.**

**by Gordon M. Pradl**

Surely the most significant text a man ever starts out to interpret is the compromise that is his own life. The events, ragged and serene, that tempt explanation were shared by others, and so it is with delicacy and humility that the autobiographer should seek to set the record straight—yet all too frequently the public demand urges on the writer some version of whitewash. Consequently, the best that one can expect to find in an autobiography are glimpses of complexity, the occasional lowering of the self-serving hand. Because of the contradictions inherent in interpreting one's own life, autobiography tends to be the more conservative of literary mediums. In part this results from the retrospective valuing that such thinking and telling requires, for a value scheme as it relates to the actions of a life, especially one usually past its summit, seeks generally for dogmatic closure, for a kind of ultimate vindication of opportunities squandered, roads not taken. Inevitably one will remember things that at last can be presented in the best of all possible colorations, and better to have one final say before the dust settles. What, then, can a reader learn from postured documentation? At its best, something about the quality of social living. Moreover, an autobiography should provide inspiration and guidance for subsequent generations.

William Phillips, cofounder and longtime editor of the *Partisan Review*, is uncertain as to what makes up a life,

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specifically his own. Because he has failed to live up to his responsibility as an autobiographer, his efforts serve more to indicate the general loss of nerve among his brand of intellectual than to help inspire future generations. But then perhaps this is precisely the stance toward experience he has in mind when he writes:

> I think the whole notion of the responsibility of intellectuals has been worked to death on all sides of the political spectrum. It should be clear by now that the very nature of intellectuals demands that they be erratic, irrational, biased, and, in some respects, irresponsible. And one of the virtues of a democracy is that everyone is free to write nonsense and take the consequences.

This curious passage, however true a characterization of New York intellectuals manning the ramparts with their self-centered ideological bickering, immediately lowers our expectations for Phillips the storyteller, because to talk this way is to have no idea of what taking the consequences means in a world where genius ends by deserting duty owing to some loose thinking about the triumph of doubt.

The world in which Phillips resides has lost itself to doubt because it insisted on confusing its own conceptual activities with the larger flow of human sympathies and dilemmas. Ironically, such confusion occurred when the intellectual grandeur he fashioned for himself failed to grant him a major role in the social dramas unfolding before his very eyes. His regret about this has led him in contradictory fashion to rhetorically underplay his significance ("it never occurred to me that our history would some day be considered important. . . . For all our vanity, our self-confidence, we felt like pygmies in comparison with not only the literary and intellectual figures of the more distant past, but with those who came just before us") while holding steadfastly to the notion of his supposed centrality to the intellectual life of the culture.

Such an assessment of Phillips undoubtedly appears too harsh given his stands against the pluralistic materialism of our society and his insights into the treacheries of Soviet Marxism. ("The Communists were experts at maintaining a fraternal atmosphere that distinguished sharply between insider and outsider. One couldn't just leave; one had to be expelled . . . . One of the most insidious things about being a Communist, perhaps about belonging to any Marxist party, has been the simultaneous inflation of one's intellectual pretensions and the shrinking of one's capacities.") But one should expect, given his privileged situation during the last 50 years, to be shown an insider's view of how ideas, beliefs, and decisions in literary circles are really arrived at. Instead, in *A Susan Sontag to Norman Mailer and Simone de Beauvoir*. The gossip revealed could be entertaining if it were not so out of place. Moreover, does anyone really need to know the petty desires and willful passions of these people?

Quiet intercourse with words is certainly not the stuff of high adventure, even if we do need reminders of the details of domesticity from time to time. But what needs to be embodied is the dynamic texture of the mind as it tried to deal with the array of forces and ideas loosed in this century: How does it maintain itself in the midst of intellectual chaos? Certainly, modernism created pressures and lost opportunities: Phillips was one of the movement's most vigorous champions, yet he all but neglects those aspects; he doesn't even try to

*Partisan View* Phillips's grasp of events only marginally exceeds an intellectual's parody of *People Magazine*. From the onset, Phillips makes it quite clear that he has rubbed shoulders with simply everyone, from Dwight Macdonald and Robert Lowell to Arthur Koestler and Jimmy Baldwin, from Lionel Trilling and penetrate the paradoxical austerity of its relationship with tradition and authority. Instead, Phillips tends to dance only on the outside. He discusses his patriotic loyalty in completing a foreign literary tour for the State Department, the Jackson Pollock he could have bought for a mere 500 dollars, his flirtation with



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and rejection of the CIA, his comic attempt to mediate among the little literary magazines rapaciously seeking Federal grant money, and Richard Poirer and Rutgers University's unbelievable attempt to take over the editorial office of the *Partisan Review*.

The inner life that supposedly sustains Phillips through all of these trials and tribulations—especially the ones centering on whether he really was a communist ( the energy expended on hair-splitting on this issue confirms our worst suspicions that even without direct affiliation, Marxism subverted whole generations )—was inspired by domestic ties and his physical health. These aspects come out in anecdotes. For example, he describes a visit that Meyer Schapiro paid to his house and says, "After he left, I said to my mother that she had seen the closest thing to a genius she would ever see—by which I meant that his mind had all the attributes of a genius. All she could say was to ask how much money he made." As for health, Phillips casually mentions, for example, that once Philip Rahv, his coeditor, flopped in a swimming pool and "would have drowned if I had not jumped in and pulled him out. Fortunately, I had worked my way through school as a swimming counselor and lifeguard."

All wrapped up in his own censorship circles, Phillips has the audacity to suggest that the *Partisan Review's* bringing together "writers committed to modernism and literary innovation, and radical social and political thinkers" represented "the first time in this country that such an idea of intellectual community had been forged, and perhaps the last time." What happened to our Founding Fathers or the various groups of thinkers in the 19th century? Phillips's amnesia reveals a disdain for America's unique intellectual contributions even as he protests the "anarchy and the insatiable appetites of the market" and "the incessant demand for novelty." In peddling his own special brand of elitism, in offering up alleged disquisitions on weighty cultural matters, Phillips reveals how the vital connections between "thinkers" and citizens have all but come completely unraveled.

Such a soft-edged ramble through a life denies the efforts demanded to create coherence. In grasping after a pseudofame, clarity and nobility are lost. And this is even more troubling considering all the tips of intellectual icebergs which Phillips surveyed. Unfortunately, the nature of our times and temperament is exposed by Phillips's stance toward remembering and reconstructing personal history, for in failing to penetrate the complexities of the past it is hardly possible to encourage insight and value in the future. □

# Historical Portraiture

**W. Bruce Lincoln: *In War's Dark Shadow: The Russians Before the Great War*; Dial Press; New York.**

**by John Moeller**

Of the many reasons for reading about the past, perhaps the most natural and common one is curiosity and the love of a good story. Although it probably is the least philosophical approach, there always will be a place for the slice-of-life history because a well-written depiction of life in an ancient polis, a single battle in the midst of a larger war, or a tumultuous decade in another land during another time is intrinsically interesting. Certainly, the historian should do more than simply weave a fascinating tale, but it is the story that first captures our attention. As in literature a good story is insufficient; in addition to knowing what happened, we also want to know why. We ask the historian for causal explanations: Why did the polis and its unique institutions develop as they did? How did the stronger side waste its superiority and lose the battle? Is there a reason that turmoil suddenly intensified after years of calm? The answers never are simple and certain, in part because there are so many ways of explaining the same events.

Some historians look to great men, believing that individuals can and do mold history. They study Stalin to understand Soviet Russia in the 1930's, and they study Gandhi to understand India during the same decade. Others, Leo Tolstoy for example, reject that premise and posit that history is the result of complex events, myriad persons, and unexplainable forces. Battles are won and lost not by great generals but by thousands of persons who have no sense of making history and by uncontrollable forces—weather, geography, unanticipated events. That is too fatalistic, suggests a third thesis, for surely events can be traced back to ideas. Some are obvious and closely related, such as the connection between Marx's ideas expressed in the middle of the 19th century and the Russian Revolution enacted at the beginning of the 20th century. Others are more doubtful and tenuous: the supposed connection between Luther's Reformation and the growth of German nazism. Most often, of course, there are no neat explanations and it is a combination of great men, social conditions, and ideas that engender the events we isolate for study.

Even then, when the cause of an event can be explained with a degree of certainty, the individual who first looked to the past out of curiosity may remain unsatisfied. As in every other aspect of our lives, one cannot avoid for long the overriding question: What does it mean? The answers depend on one's perspective. For some observers the meaning of history is found not in the events themselves, but in the lives of those persons

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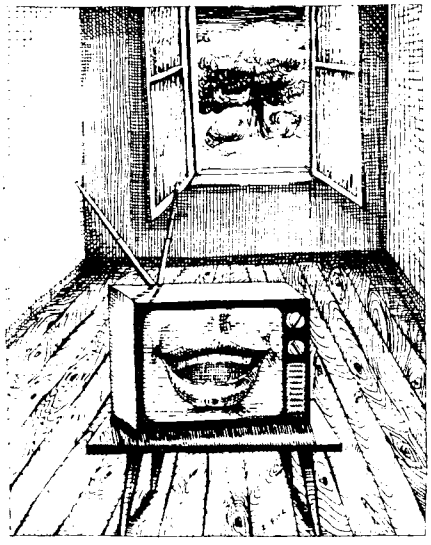
affected by the events. The real meaning of that war in 1812, Tolstoy opines, can be discovered by looking at the lives of individual Russians at every level of society. Others, to the contrary, will ask what it means for the broader society. If men do make history, if different social conditions do cause different results, and if ideas do have consequences, then we can and must ask which kinds of men and which forms of society and which ideas we want to encourage. And if we really are ambitious and agree with Eric Voegelin that human existence is best known in man's historical existence, we might compare the period under investigation with other periods throughout history in an effort to extract some clues about what it means to be a human being.

W. Bruce Lincoln's *In War's Dark Shadow: The Russians Before the Great War* is primarily history of the first sort, a fascinating story. It consists of two broad parts: the first six chapters sketch a composite portrayal of Russian society at the end of the 19th century; the remainder of the book follows the events —both great and seemingly insignificant —between the war with Japan in 1904 and World War I. As a slice of life, especially of those "remote areas of Russian life that remain virtually unknown in the West" to the nonspecialist, it is a complete and satisfying account.

Although the narrating of the events themselves is not new and is often based on secondary, scholarly works, that is of lesser importance than the book's depiction of what it was like to be a Russian at the turn of the century. Most likely, one would have been a peasant and would have suffered so that Russia might be a great nation in the circles of European politics. The peasant's life was onerous by any standards, but it seems more difficult when the raw statistics are consulted. Imagine an outbreak of syphilis so great that in some places as many as four out of ten children had it, having been infected by mothers prior to birth. And it is no wonder that productivity lagged so slowly, given the fact that by 1914 only 10 percent of the peasants had either an iron plough or a plough with iron teeth. Peasant life wasn't as ideal as Tolstoy depicted it to be.

Still, there was evidence of Russia's entering the modern industrialized world. Industrial growth doubled in the 1890's and then again in the first five



years of the 20th century. Two groups emerged. The first comprised the new industrialists—often old believers or former serfs—who followed the path of our Rockefellers and Carnegies in amassing great wealth and advancing the arts. One was Pavel Tretiakov, scion of a textile fortune, who, in 1898, gave Moscow a collection of 1,757 paintings done by Russian artists. Not surprisingly, the fortunes of Tretiakov and others were at the expense of another group—the emerging urban class. Troubling that new class were all of the problems that had plagued urban industrialization elsewhere in the world: housing shortages, disease, drunkenness, child labor, industrial accidents, and an underclass of human beings. Some transcended that existence, however, by becoming literate and learning a skill. Eventually they became a revolutionary, political force.

Russian revolutionaries existed independent of urbanization and developed rapidly in the 1860's. They came from many directions: some were middle-class intellectuals who retreated to theory; some were populists who began as enlightened youths, traveling the countryside at the end of the 1870's educating the peasantry, and who ended as radical terrorists; some were nihilists who criticized every accepted value and institution and who believed that society must be destroyed so that it could be reconstructed on scientific and rational bases; and some were socialists who shared a common origin but differed widely on how to carry out a successful revolution. All of these revolutionaries were in bitter conflict with the final group, members of the old guard who wished to preserve the Russia that had served them so well for so long. Although frequently incompetent and insensitive to the social problems that surrounded them, they fully understood the nature of the battle and willingly resorted to extreme measures to maintain their position. Over the years the Czar and his supporters instituted pogroms against the Jews, senselessly engaged the Japanese in a losing war, proposed minor and temporary solutions when even significant ones might have been too late, and finally sent unprepared peasants—often without weapons—to fight a war in Europe.

Lincoln's primary purpose is to convey a feeling for Russian life 80 years ago, and thus he doesn't attempt to explain why the society developed as it did, nor does he suggest why a Bolshevik revolution occurred. Underlying the whole inquiry is the belief that events are caused by the complex interaction of men, ideas, and social conditions. Although there is no single great man, the story of Russia's entering the 20th century is replete with identifiable individuals. Lincoln interjects vignettes of specific industrialists, generals, revolutionaries, and other actors as illustration of the broader social groups. Likewise, he shows that ideas help explain events. Lenin and Martov may be



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the main protagonists among the socialists, but to understand them one must realize that they are tied to Plekhanov and then Marx by a single idea that evolves over time until it is applied to Russia in 1917. Similarly, one cannot understand the ideas of the nihilists who captured the imagination of Russian novelists of the day without understanding their roots in Western scientific, rational thought. But the key to understanding that period is to recognize that neither men nor ideas exist in a vacuum. Both evolved from and responded to a society that was alive and in flux. Historians speak of the 1905 revolution, but Lincoln reminds us that it was a revolution only after the fact. The real truth of that revolution was not that revolutionary men and ideas were leading the way, but that the government was weak and that thousands of Russian people spontaneously expressed their hunger, anger, and frustration.

That is why the meaning of these times for Lincoln is not to be found in universal statements about human existence or in neat causal explanations for past events. The real meaning is to be found in the lives of the Russian people, individuals with names and personal histories. Consider the discussion of Tretiakov. Most accounts would emphasize his great wealth and patronage of the arts. The more revealing truth, however, is that the reason he collected art of living Russian painters instead of European art is that he doubted his ability to distinguish between authentic paintings and forgeries. That single story says much about what it meant to be a Russian entering a new world. Such profiles provide clues about human existence as they show that beneath the different cultures and forms of government there are simple beings suffering, struggling, daring to change, grasping the familiar, and most important—whether consciously or innately—trying to make something of their lives. □

# The Surly Skies & Other Civil Slights

**Arlie Russell Hochschild: *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling;* University of California Press; Berkeley.**

**F. G. Bailey: *The Tactical Uses of Passion: An Essay on Power, Reason, and Reality;* Cornell University Press; Ithaca, NY.**

**by Betsy Clarke**

What kinds of behavior does our culture encourage? The question is ever in style, and usually a pat and misleading answer is on the tongue of every commentator. Greed, bellicosity, phoniness, racism, sexism, and speciesism come immediately to their minds. However, the question inevitably is worthy of a more meaningful analysis. Our culture has accomplished much, and the system it both fosters and benefits from continues to grind on. These books focus on the how and why.

*The Managed Heart*, an attempt to show that the upwardly mobile stewardess is just as oppressed as an eight-year-old factory worker of the last century, is so unfocused and poorly developed that some of the valid points become lost. Close contact with the public, always difficult, is worse when one's behavior is relentlessly scrutinized by superiors, and can be virtually impossible now that standards of deportment have all but vanished. Though never approaching the ideal, public behavior began to disintegrate markedly when the liberal establishment adopted the radical view that codes of conduct based on good taste and consideration for others were repressive and hypocritical. As a result, many employees in service industries squeezed by intense competition must respond to all manner of abuse with fraudulent good humor and indulgence —or lose their jobs. That female flight attendants suffer more than most from this handiwork is both unfair and ironic. To listen to a leftist author complain about this result, though, is a little like listening to the proverbial boy who murdered his parents complain he is an orphan.

Like everything from defense to herpes to higher taxes, "emotion work," as Mrs. Hochschild ungrammatically calls it, is a "woman's issue." Though men now pass out magazines on airplanes and mix Bloody Marys, the passengers respond to them differently than they do to the female counterparts, rendering the job different also, according to the author. The male attendants consequently lord their elevated status over the women. The exceptions, of course, are the homosexual stewards, who get a couple of big plugs in this book, including, 'The gay stewards are great,' says one female. "'If Pan Am had any sense, it would *prefer* to hire them.'" But the proposal is so fraught with affirmative action problems—especially if the gay males are black—that it is probably best left alone.

Mrs. Hochschild is a Berkeley sociologist who is best known for her "more feminist than thou" posturing in *Mother Jones*. The woman who is ready to go to war (nonnuclear, of course) over her dubious findings that men watch more television than women claims in *The Managed Heart* that company-forced smiles lead to emotional burnout and identity crises. It is not clear what forms these problems take or even whether they are in fact caused by self-control in the face of adversity. There is one reference to "the considerable medical problems of flight attendants," but whether the culprit is reluctant smiling or jet lag is never probed. Perhaps one problem causing conflict is that people seem to enter the profession in spite of the work rather

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than because of it. "We were flying for money, men, adventure, travel," says one ste ardess—for every reason, that is, except saving lives during a crash landing.

There are some revealing insights into airline policy and attitudes that customers might appreciate knowing. For example, pregnant women, mothers, small children, and the elderly are all considered pariahs by flight attendants and their trainers to the point where these groups are mocked in Halloween skits. Naturally, the liberal author does not come to the defense of any of them, nor is she outraged by the employees' stated preference for businessmen and wealthy passengers.

In a free and open economy like ours, where no one is forced to work, not even for money, it is difficult to sympathize with these employees. Some are in the wrong field and should get out. Others haven't yet learned that life is a series of trade-offs and that certain unpleasant obligations must inevitably be endured. Still, it is clear that employees, customers, and businesses all take advantage of each other. A more interesting essay would have examined what courtesies and obligations are morally required of these three groups given that, in our new service-oriented economy, tact, friendliness, and tolerance are marketed, purchasable commodities.

Both *The Managed Heart* and *The Tactical Uses of Passion* examine how culture affects our acceptance and use of emotion. F. G. Bailey's essay "on power, reason, and reality," though, examines how one can use the culture's prescribed emotions properly to instigate action. Bailey's work is both a "how-to" and a "what-is" book, similar to something that can be found in rhetoric or communications classes. The book's three sections examine displays of emotion and what they mean, how rhetorical devices might best employ the passions, and what the rules are for using them. As a bonus, Bailey, an anthropologist at the University of California at San Diego, takes deadly aim at university faculty committee members, a tact especially pleasurable for those who believe that higher education is going to the dogs.

That reason rules the world less than we think is not an original idea. But Bailey's object is "to understand movement between the use of reason and the use of passion." The key lies in the examination of codes, selves, and the types of membership (especially in terms of relative power) of various committees and political groups. The workings of the culture on an individual's methods of persuasion and their effectiveness are what interest Bailey. It is the superficial that engages him, not the unrevealed. To argue with him on a deeper level is a trap. He does not know what this or that tactic unearths about the deep, dark psyche, and it does not matter.

His examples—coming from post-Gandhi India, local California politics, and even John le Carré—are interesting in their own right, but do not always support his contentions well. Mercifully, the examples tend to be remote, unlikely to arouse a reader's passions and so blind him to what the author is explaining. The one brief deviation, naturally, seems inaccurate and unfair. The reference is to "pseudo-cerebral devices" which he calls "verbal sleight of hand." They are used to establish consensus seemingly by reason but really by assertion, according to Bailey. The author refers to a newspaper article which mentions the "vigorous advocacy of public funds in support of 'private' schools." Bailey identifies this statement as a ruse because "the intended beneficiary is in fact parochial schools." Wrong. The real beneficiaries are private schools; parochial schools are a part of that category. (As long as we're getting passionate on the matter, the real beneficiaries are the students, their parents, society, and the world.) In any case, if the word is misleading, blame the press, not the measure's proponents or the underlying philosophy.

The benefit of the book is the acknowledgment that reason has been overrated and emotion underappreciated. Emotion, after all, is what fires people to act. *The Tactical Uses of Passion* suggests which combinations of rhetoric and emotion persuade and which do not. Those of us whose minds are made up on practically every important issue had better get busy and use it. □

## In the Mail

***Beyond Reagan: Alternatives for the '80s*: edited by A. Gartner, C. Greer & F. Riessman; Harper & Row; New York.** We shudder to think what it may be if the authors of this book—among others: Ralph Nader, Bertram Gross, Curtis Gans—would have an opportunity to do "their thing" to America.

***Philosophy and Science Fiction*: edited by Michael Philips; Prometheus Books;** Buffalo, NY. Obviously, a strong correlation exists, to the delight of all concerned.

***Those Swinging Years: The Autobiography of Charlie Barnet with Stanley Dance*: Louisiana State University Press; Baton Rouge, LA.** One of those books no one knows why they had been written and published, although the authors may think they know.

***A Little Learning; When The Going Was Good* by Evelyn Waugh; Little, Brown & Co.; Boston.** Two volumes of leisurely notes by one of the century's best pens. A sample: "Talking films were just being introduced, and had set back by twenty years the one vital art of the century."

***United States* by Laurie Anderson; Harper & Row; New York.** Superbly unintentional, perfect (and lavishly illustrated) example of disintegration of the modern mind as personified by the author and the publishers.



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# Wonder Woman?

**Gloria Steinem: *Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions*: Holt, Rinehart and Winston: New York.**

**by Diane Long Hoeveler**

Gloria Steinem tells a number of revealing anecdotes in this collection of essays. In one piece she describes how she and George McGovern drove to John Kenneth Galbraith's home for a weekend of heavy political strategizing. After the weekend talks, during which Steinem was greatly impressed with McGovern's brilliance, they got in the car and discovered that McGovern had left the key turned in the ignition. The engine was dead. Steinem remarks that she realized then that McGovern, like her, "was great in emergencies but can't handle everyday life." This realization, so rarely stated in her other essays, is a key problem with her vision of women's lives. Steinem is very competent in outlining large and universal problems facing women in general, but her theories do not correspond to the realities of everyday life for the majority of individual American women.

Steinem essentially answers the question: What could a woman with intelligence and no obligations do with her life? She could take up, as Steinem has, politics, pornography, work, and words. This has led her to work as a volunteer for McGovern, Eugene McCarthy, and Bella Abzug, to meditate on the differences in female bodies, and to muse on the political consequences that would occur if men menstruated. Steinem apparently thinks that she is the veritable keystone of contemporary feminism. She supposes that her work as an editor of *Ms.* magazine has established her as guru to the women of America. She strains to explain how difficult, heroic, and beleaguered women's lives are, but somehow the refrain rings false. One does not sense that Steinem knows what reality is like for most American women. She writes from Olympus as a female eunuch, while the majority of her possible but not probable audience exists in a more mundane realm.

Steinem's life is free of family, husband, and children, the usual encumbrances that most women in the world possess. And yet Steinem has set herself up (or has been set up) as a spokesperson for women. But for which women? How many women in this country—or anywhere else, for that matter—identify with the opportunities and freedoms she has had? Steinem may be correct in many of her assessments of sexual discrimination, inequality, and harassment, but her vision is always skewed by her lack of empathy and experience, her limited awareness of the average woman's everyday realities. As most women know, once one becomes a mother, one is never again simply a woman, an individual. This is a fact that a childless woman never understands, never feels, until she too joins the mass of women who face the real issues of sexual politics —not theoretical debates about women in Africa, but the challenge to find the time to wash one's hair. Steinem may attempt to envision the concerns of the world's women, but she imagines an illusory universe where women live in some divine-like individuality, free to self-actualize and write five letters every week to their congressperson. Steinem's universe is one wherein none but the chosen few live.

Does Steinem, any better than Freud, understand what women want? She is correct in her essay "Why Young Women Are More Conservative" when she remarks that the important factor in most young women's lives is acceptance, belonging to another person or group. But she somehow assumes that this impulse to connect is something that is outgrown, sloughed off as one matures. Anthropologists (whom Steinem is continually citing for support) tell us differently, as do medical researchers. The need to belong to a support unit is a basic human need and one that, in fact, enhances our longevity.

Even when Steinem admits this need, she turns the discussion to a need for perfectly equal relationships, an arrangement where both mother and father divide the care of their children. Such sharing, indeed, is laudable and many feminists are working towards it, but the realities of the marketplace and the facts of the human condition cannot be ignored. When two people work and attempt to share childcare, conflicts arise and compromises follow. And several difficulties emerge. How many women want their children in 40-hour a week institutional settings? How many childless women understand the guilt and pain that comes from any prolonged separation from our children? How many women occasionally curse their children and long for a life with no obligation to anyone but self? But how many of us would, under any circumstances, deny the love and growth we have experienced by nurturing and caring for children?

Steinem's misconceptions of motherhood seem to derive from her relation-

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ship with her own mother, painfully recorded in her essay "Ruth's Song." So much energy was expended in being a daughter, surviving her mother's bouts of mental illness, that Steinem seems to have become forever frozen in the daughter role. The saddest and most revealing episode comes when Steinem tells of her asking her mother about why she did not walk out on her marriage. When her mother replied that she would not have given birth to Gloria and her sister if she had, Steinem self-righteously proclaims that the mother "might have been born instead." What Steinem does not understand is the transforming love that mothers feel for their children. What she does not comprehend is that what may appear to be merely sacrifice is not sacrifice to a mother who is motivated by love, not personal gain. What Steinem fails to grasp is that human relationships are not based on power, but on love, and that is a reality that never seems to enter into her vision of possibilities. She does not seem to realize that women might choose to love their husbands and children, not as slaves love, but as equals who have no need or desire to give commands, or to calculate who has done what for whom.

No contemporary woman who is sensitive to the issues raised by Steinem can simply dismiss them. But those women who have tried to juggle family and

career resent bland statements about how they have to work both at home and at work. These women have chosen this life, they know the true costs, and they have accepted them.

Finally, Steinem's vision seems inadequate; not only because it fails to touch the personal realities that women face, but because it errs in thinking that all human problems can be legislated away. "If only the ERA had passed," is a refrain she sings often throughout these essays. To believe that our individual lives can be changed drastically by Washington bureaucracy is to be naive. The hard and cold fact is that each person bears responsibility for the shape of her or his life—its accomplishments and its frustrations. Salvation for women, like salvation for any group of human beings, is won individually. Each of us must fight the same battle that every human being fights in order to make ourselves into the realization of our best imaginings. Steinem should know this fact from her own experience—after all, she started out as a poor tapdancer in Toledo.

Some of what Steinem has accomplished is notable and valuable, and her energy and work for women are admirable in many ways. But she is not a role model for all women. Women in the real world need a woman to speak for them who understands the complexities of human relationships and human love, one who can speak in concrete terms about both the burdens and the blessings of being a woman and a mother. □

***Monuments Out of Garbage***

Mr. Robert Woodward, of Watergate notoriety, who has now made it to the position of assistant managing editor of the *Washington Post*, has emerged as perhaps the epitome of contemporary journalism. He is demi-educated, quarter-intelligent, and primitively smart. He does not know how to write. His ineptitude in structuring a text and imbuing it with style verges on caricature. The veracity of dialogues in his narratives—a device he uses with the savagery of a buccaneer on a killing spree, and on which he constructs most of his arguments, innuendos, accusations, vilifications, and conclusions—turns into an unintentional parody *au par* with a turn-of-the-century dime novel subtlety. A most recent sample from a book on the late actor John Belushi:

**LIBERAL CULTURE**

> Cognac had been spilled all over. There was urine on the floor. And on a table a mound of cocaine, piled high and white.
>
> "John, you're killing yourself!" Landis [the director of the movie, *The Blues Brothers*] shouted. "This is economically unfeasible. Do not do this to my movie!"

Why did Mr. Woodward write a book on Mr. Belushi? In an interview in the *Chicago Tribune*, the author comes up with several reasons. Two of them are worth quoting: "I was looking for something different, a non-Washington story . . . . I thought he had a natural comic talent that was unsurpassed . . . ."

In a more self-demanding society, the deceased Mr. Belushi would be given as much attention as a wet mop. It is said that he expressed the sense of humor of his generation. We do not, by principle, believe that worthiness of generations can be easily measured and established, but it seems to us that generations which found fun in Chaplin, Keaton, W. C. Fields, and the Marx Brothers must have been a hell of a lot better than those to whom Belushi seems a riot. What's most depressing, however, is that Mr. Woodward sees a mission in describing Mr. Belushi's miserable disintegration through drugs and bestiality as an opus on "self-destruction and failure of success." Actually, his vocation is erecting monuments out of refuse. □



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COMMENDABLES

# Culture as Commodity

**Ronald Berman:** ***Culture & Politics;*** University Press of America: Washington, DC.

The government consists of people who, presumably, work to aid, assist, and otherwise cooperate with the people who foot the bill for such activities, namely, the taxpayers. There is, then, an essential employer-employee relationship existent here. Anyone who needs some extensive auto service probably wouldn't hire a lawnmower repairman to do the task, even though said repairman is capable of handling various aspects of internal combustion engines on wheels. A baker with a flair for chocolate chip cookies and other miniconfections isn't the sort of person to whom one would entrust the creation of a wedding cake. Mediocrity isn't so much the issue here; ability is the key concern. As ads for the hardware industry used to advise: don't use a screwdriver to do the job of a hammer. Even the most cursory examination of the Washington landscape provides a certain sense that those who operate our government—both elected and appointed officials as well as the numerous factotums who have gained employment through the ministrations of the former—are, by and large, lawnmower, chocolate chip, and screwdriver experts who are physically and intellectually dwarfed by all of the Capitol's noble edifices and the ideas chiseled there on: the executors and expediters of the national will and interest tend to be makeshift employees.

The contretemps of Ronald Berman while he was the Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities (1971-1977) are instructive. Here is a man who is a pro—a scholar, a professor, a writer, a thinker—who found himself in the midst of squabbles initiated by obtuse, semiblind, deaf, and dumb politicians and their attendant hacks and flacks whose understanding of the humanities can be measured via an inverse relationship with the degree to which they can be humiliated—and when did a political type ever succumb to humility? What is most disturbing about Berman's case, which he reveals in a good-natured manner in *Culture & Politics* (strange bedfellows, as he shows), is that the lack of knowledge, understanding, and intelligence is not a deficiency limited to congresspersons who are interested in securing as many bucks as possible from the Federal coffers for the folks back home, but which is also abounding in the highest levels. Berman writes, for example, "The White House was under the impression that I was not a Republican," then adds, "I hoped they had Brezhnev on file under Soviet Union."

A nation isn't truly great because it has an awesome GNP or some other economically measurable attainment. What it creates and how it thinks are vital to its true stature, yet politicians, of both parties, tend to separate the two spheres a la Marx—the base (economics) and superstructure (arts and humanities)—and so scratch their little heads and figure that if money is being spent for the superstructure, they want a piece of it, period. They can understand cash; culture is another matter. About the two national structures for the superstructure—the NEH and the National Endowment for the Arts—Berman writes.

> The two Endowments will always be subject to political pressure, which must routinely be fought off. They will always blunder—the Arts Endowment will always make a grant for some absurd poem that everyone else hates, and the Humanities Endowment will always make some constituency unhappy by satisfying another.

We hope that those doing the fighting are of Berman's caliber and aren't merely some overpaid yet cut-rate pop guns. □

# Higher Education

**Mark Royden Winchell:** ***William F. Buckley, Jr.;*** Twayne: Boston.

From the academy he came and to the academy he has returned, though not precisely in a Vico-like turn. That is, William F. Buckley, who needs no further introduction or description, arrived on the "scene" that he is so much a part of—nay—*director* of via his *God and Man at Yale;* now, 33 years later, Buckley has been distilled into a slim blue volume destined to find its way onto university library shelves across the land. Thus, it's not exactly a historical circle, cycle, or spiral in his case, but more of a transformation: Buckley has long since "made it"; now he is legitimate.

By and large, the Twayne volumes in the "United States Authors Series" tend to be more informational than ideological. (Of course, one can argue that the selection of a subject, the use of adjectives, etc. constitute a more or less covert ideological stance, but that's really a case of picking at nits by those who probably haven't spent any time with the volumes.) Students turn to the books to find out what particular authors did during their careers; both personal and professional data are provided: they are more than encyclopedia entries but less than full-blown critical biographies. In a sense, then, the books can generally be described as being "adequate."

Mark Royden Winchell's contribution, however, is refreshing. Buckley is nothing if not opinionated and controversial; Winchell seems to have been infected by his subject: this volume is anything but pedantic Cream of Wheat. Consider, for example, the following passage:

> When Dr. Fidel Castro (as he was known in liberal circles) rode down from the mountains of Cuba to deliver that *scepter'd isle* from the Mafia
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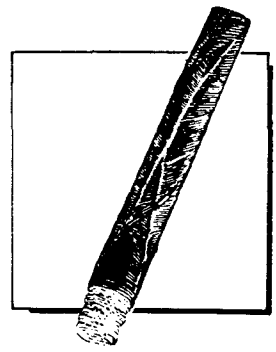
> 
>
> to the Kremlin, American conservatives experienced an uneasy sense of *déjà vu.* Before Mao had taken over China, we were assured by the Owen Lattimores of this world that what we were witnessing was nothing more than agrarian reform. Now, a decade later, a new crop of savants was telling us that Dr. Castro was the George Washington of Cuba. It wasn't long, however, before



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*Señor* Washington started sounding like Lenin and acting like Robespierre.

First-person plural is regularly used in academic writing for the purpose of maintaining a bit of distance and consequently creating a sense of studious legitimacy; in this case, though, the "we" bespeaks personal involvement. More books like this one—informed, sensible, polemical—will help counter much of the leftist blather that's passed off in classrooms as vanadium-clad truth. □

## In Focus

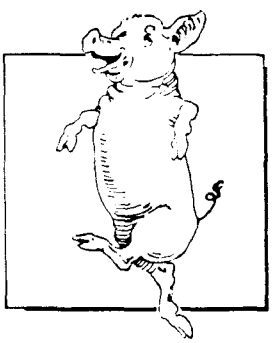
# Opening Philo's Box

**Austin Ranney: *Channels of Power: The Impact of Television on American Politics;*** American Enterprise/Basic Books; New York.

**Montague Kern, Patricia W. Levering, and Ralph B. Levering; *The Kennedy Crises: The Press, the Presidency, and Foreign Policy;*** The University of North Carolina Press; Chapel Hill, NC.

Philo T. Farnsworth was not a politician, yet it is tempting to blame much of what is wrong with American politics upon the inventor who made television possible. For as television news has triumphed over older forms of journalism and thus gained tremendous power over the public perception of American policy and policymakers it has often used that power in recent years to laud mindless rebellion, to undermine foreign policy, and to foster unprecedented cynicism about institutions. Many thoughtful observers have concluded that telejournalism has proved so destructive because of the ideological biases of those who practice it. But Austin Ranney argues in *Channels of Power* that the deleterious effects of television news result chiefly from the "structural" demands of a medium originally devised for entertainment. Sensational images, shocking "scoops," and adversarial interviews, Ranney maintains, simply attract more viewers—and advertisers—than do accurate reports on the status quo or reasoned exposition of ambiguous events.

While Ranney's thesis is not without credibility, *The Kennedy Crises* provides evidence that ideology does play a significant role in skewing the national news. Though the authors of *The*



*Kennedy Crises* focus on the political influence of newspapers rather than television, what they have to say is germane to any discussion of telejournalism, since, as Ranney points out, the networks rely heavily on leading newspapers to define what deserves attention. Twenty years ago, the Kennedy analysts point out, the editorial "tendency to mute criticism of the president" made it easier for a Chief Executive to win public support at critical junctures than it is now. Journalists have become more antagonistic toward the government in part because of the way television's rise has effected "changes in the nature of the media." But more important, in the view of these three scholars, is the appearance of "different values and forces" in society at large. Ranney believes that "the advent of television is the most profound change that has occurred in all advanced industrial societies, including America, since the end of World War II." But so long as humans, not television satellites, must make moral and intellectual decisions about their society and its governance, the emergence of different "values and forces" for making those decisions must be seen as more important—and in this case more troubling—than Philo's opening of a new broadcast medium. After all, though Larry Flynt has made his national reputation through his use of printing presses, the difference between him and the Bible-publisher Gutenberg is more significant than the technological similarity. □

# Dostoevsky on the Couch

***Joseph Frank: Dostoevsky: The Years of Ordeal, 1850-1859;*** Princeton University Press; Princeton, NJ.

Because biographers are bound to the realm of verifiable facts in a way that novelists are not, their work has always been distinctly different from novelists'. But the best biographers have nonetheless shared with the best novelists the guiding conviction that the events of actual human lives, just like the fictive happenings posited in novels, are embedded in some meaningful story, comedic, tragic, or pathetic. However in the 20th century, avant-garde "antinovelists" and nihilistic Freudians have challenged the notion of "story" as but another bourgeois convention, a childish projection of pattern onto the aimless flux of biological urges and coincidental events. The damage wrought upon serious fiction by these attacks upon "story" is perceptible in the writings of John Barth, Donald Barthelme, and other writers who portray a meaningless and irrational universe by violating every stable conception of plot, character, and even syntax. The death of "story" has inflicted havoc upon biography too, though of a somewhat different sort. Lacking imaginative courage, many biographers no longer try to establish the spiritual and imaginative integrity of the events they chronicle. When they do venture beyond the sterile cataloging of dates, names, and documents, they do so not in search of the meaningful and unifying life story waiting to be discovered, but instead in search of "symptoms" explicable within some pseudoscientific theory of psychology.

The reader of the second volume of Joseph Frank's biography of Dostoevsky will be glad that the book, for the most part, tells the *story* of 10 years in the life of this great Russian novelist. This story of political intrigue, mock execution, imprisonment, isolation, and first love is narrated with analytical intelligence and careful attention to documentation, but also with the artistic and sympathetic imagination that makes storytelling without fictionalizing possible. Unfortunately, however, Professor Frank descends from story to reductive psychology when considering the spiritual rebirth that Dostoevsky experienced while in prison, awakening in him a



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new sense of fellow feeling with others who shared his Russian Orthodox faith. There can be little doubt that this experience was *the* decisive event in Dostoevsky's life story. But to include this event within that story *as* story would require an imaginative daring undaunted by the modern intellectual proscription against accepting religion on its own terms. Lamentably, Professor Frank lacks such daring. He informs us that in order to treat Dostoevsky's religious regeneration in a "detached and impartial way" he must use the agnostic William James's *Varieties of Religious Experience* as an interpretive grid, aided by more recent "neuropsychiatric literature devoted to analyzing the psycho-physical mechanisms by which conversions are obtained." Though Dostoevsky suffered great physical and emotional hardship during his four years in Siberian prison, this giant among storytellers would doubtless have suffered much more and much longer rather than reduce the story of his spiritual regeneration to Professor Frank's clinical dissection of what phenomenon in terms of "stress that leads to disruption of the brain functions." (BC)

## From Bibles to Banditti

**Geoffrey Wainright: *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine, and Life;*** Oxford University Press: New York.

**Harvey Cox: *Religion in the Secular City: Toward a Postmodern Theology;*** Simon and Schuster: New York.

Those who favor an ecumenical understanding of Christianity often point out that all denominations are united by a single


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holy book, the Bible. However, since modern semioticians have shown that every reading of a text constitutes a new text, this supposed unity is more apparent than real. Indeed, as Geoffrey Wainright explains in *Doxology*, any community of belief must interpret Scripture through the "hermeneutical grids" of contemporary prayer, hymns, rituals, and creeds. Though he yearns for ecclesiastical unity and is in search of a doxology that will foster it, Professor Wainright demonstrates that different liturgical grids do lead to quite disparate understandings of God and His governance. The need then is clear for not only an accepted text but also for authorized interpreters of that text.

Official adherence to the standard of *sola Scriptura*, itself not a scriptural standard, has made this need difficult to fulfill among Protestants. The Protestant ideology which originally took Scripture away from a corrupt priesthood and gave it to common people was subsequently powerless to give the reader official guidance as to what the text meant or how it should be applied. As Harvey Cox observes in *Religion in the Secular City*, Protestantism therefore largely "lost the Bible," because those who were able and willing to assert institutional authority in explicating the text were not devout pastors in the churches but instead skeptical modernist scholars in the universities.

But after secular modernists had taken over as shepherds, many Protestant flocks began to get hungry in the barren meadows where they were led. Millions consequently tried to "get back to the Bible." But this fundamentalist impulse, examined at some length by Dr. Cox, still entailed the untenable "myth of self-interpretation." Denying the need for institutional interpretative authority, fundamentalists have made their shared Bible a battlefield in an "acrimonious history" of never-ending quarrel and schism. This is one of the reasons that Dr. Cox concludes that fundamentalism offers little hope of helping either theology or politics find a way out of the problems of modernity.

While it is hard not to agree that fundamentalists' efforts at "embalming the Bible" will prevent them from providing stable religious or cultural leadership, Dr. Cox's own credulous partiality to liberation theology as the best way to give Scripture back to "ordinary people" seems religiously destructive and politically perilous. For liberation theologians (usually Catholics, not Protestants) are not giving Scripture to anyone without the overlay of their own peculiar "hermeneutical grid," wherein frequent references to class struggle and iniquitous capitalism make their indebtedness to Marxist atheists quite clear. Professor Wainright contends that religious political activism often becomes a species of "ideological secularism," lacking "grace and ultimacy" and leading to "decline from God." Precisely such a decline appears evident in Dr. Cox's thought. Indeed, Dr. Cox asserts that past skeptical liberal exegetes prepared the way for the liberation theology he now finds so enthralling: evidently, the God of salvation must be "killed" before Scripture can be properly reinterpreted as a handbook for pious revolutionaries. *Religion in the Secular City* is correct in positing a crisis in Western religious leadership and scriptural interpretation. But if this Harvard theologian's "solution" is actually implemented, millions of believers will discover that the new state-sanctioned "hermeneutical grid" around Bible-reading is constructed of the barbed wire of communism. (BC) □

# Perceptibles

**Martha Grimes: *The Dirty Duck;*** Little, Brown: Boston.

The top three authors about whom books have been written are Shakespeare, Dante, then Goethe. The fact that Ms. Grimes's *The Dirty Duck* is set in Stratford-on-Avon, though in the present, is a painfully obvious clue that you-know-who will be trotted out onto the stage. Fortunately, the author hasn't created another murder mystery around the Bard; justly, she uses poor Kit Marlowe instead, but, to be sure, Will is lurking. Still, the effort is much less contrived than some of the Bardic volumes found on the nonfiction shelves. □

* * *

**Philip McFarland: *Seasons of Fear;*** Schocken Books: New York.

"All history," observed Benedetto Croce, "is contemporary history." Particularly is this so when past events come alive again in powerful literary recreations of the sort Philip McFarland offers in *Seasons of Fear*. Somewhat in the manner of Defoe in *Journal of the Plague Year*, McFarland has drawn upon letters, journals, and court records to functionally reconstruct the so-called "Negro Plot" in New York in 1741, in which 34 people, mostly blacks, were hanged or burned for imaginary crimes. A lively remembrance that white authorities once committed such offenses against blacks may properly make today's judges and legislators determined that the horrors of colonial New York are never reenacted. However, a few radical champions of "black causes" apparently want more than justice. They want to romanticize current black criminals as heroic rebels, not accountable to a white-dominated society guilty of past injustices against their race. But to make skin color a 20th-century license for violence beyond the law can spawn its own atrocities, as terrible as any perpetrated by 18th-century bigotry. □

* * *

**Lester D. Langley: *The Banana Wars: An Inner History of American Empire, 1900-1934;*** University of Kentucky Press: Lexington, KY.

Typically, Americans consider themselves "informed" about world affairs if they are "up on the news." Certainly, in an era of ever-shifting political and economic configurations, the citizens of the most powerful republic cannot afford to be *un*informed about the latest developments. Shaping a true perspective on happenings in far-off regions, though, requires not only the news from the area, but also the *not*-news, the history. At a time when U.S. involvement in the bloody and turbulent politics of Central America is increasingly a part of the news, Americans would do well to read historical works such as Lester D. Langley's *The Banana Wars*. This work chronicles American military involvement in Cuba, Nicaragua, and Hispaniola during the first three decades of this century. Dr. Langley's analysis emphasizes the difficulty of using armed forces to convert traditionally undemocratic countries into American-style democracies. Such a study should properly dampen overly sanguine expectations concerning what the Marines (or CIA) could now hope to accomplish south of the border. The deficiency of Dr. Langley's book, though, is that it uses a history that ends in 1934 to argue finally that "direct military solutions" should be no



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SCREEN

# Polynesian Postcards from Dr. Freud

***The Bounty*; Directed by Roger Donaldson; Screenplay by Robert Bolt; Orion Pictures.**

**by Stephen Macaulay**

A number of people in the movie reviewing business are busy commenting on whether the team of Anthony Hopkins and Mel Gibson in 1984 measures up to Charles Laughton and Clark Gable in 1935 and/or Trevor Howard and Marlon Brando in 1962. This smacks of handicapping midget tag-team wrestling matches, so let's ignore that whole issue. A more provocative matter is whether anyone—besides Messrs. Hopkins, Gibson, director Roger Donaldson, screenwriter Robert Bolt, and, last but certainly not least, moneyman Dino DeLaurentis—needs another go through of the bad times on the *H.M.S. Bounty*. A full-page ad for the latest version includes the line "After 200 years, the truth behind the legend," which is slightly disingenuous, given that the mutiny took place in 1787. However, let that pass, too. The gist of the statement implies (A) the previous films on the subject weren't the *real thing* and (B) people in 1984 want the nitty gritty—or that *someone*, besides the beforementioned figures, cares. As for point A, it's true that the '35 and '62 movies were based on a set of adventure books while the latest is based on *Captain Bligh and Mr. Christian*, a 1972 revisionist history by Richard Hough that, apparently, makes William Bligh's surname something other than metonymy for "bastard captain." Since the British navy didn't clap Bligh in irons and break his sword (or whatever they did) for the contretemps surrounding the appropriation of his ship, it's probably true that Bligh wasn't as awful as previously depicted and was simply as unpopular as all supervisors are at any given point in time—though most bosses don't have their subordinates spend a month in the middle of a deadly maelstrom. Making coffee or running errands are the contemporary complaints. And while on the subject of the contemporary scene, point B can be addressed: people aren't concerned with historical exactitude but with the style of the leading men, which is why so much ink has been invested in comparisons. When it comes to accuracy, let's face it: it's hard to imagine that the bona fide Mr. Christian was as handsome as his 20th-century Australian interpreter—but now I'm getting into the midget wrestling ring.

"Call me Fletch." Had *The Bounty* been made as a first-person recounting rather than through flashbacks from Bligh's point of view (which leaves some questions of cinematic veracity ["the truth" says the ad] hanging in mid-air: where did the post-mutiny scenes showing the *Bounty* come from?), this would have made a resonant opening line. The character is generally designated "Mr. Christian" and intimately addressed as "Fletcher," but the diminutive "Fletch" captures more of the sense of the man—the *young* man. When Fletch appears on the screen for the first time, he is in a London club, betting, along with his soused pals, about whether one of their colleagues, who is comatose, is merely in his cups or dead. All are having a boisterously good time. Had Fletch's friend William Bligh not arrived and taken him away from the revels with an offer that would put Fletch on a cruise on the ocean as an officer, it's likely that Fletch and his cronies would have left the club and gone cruising for some wenches. Although the guys would have had to use a carriage instead of a Z-28 Camaro for transportation, their ends wouldn't be any different than those sought by yuppies who hang out in fern bars.

Being well-set and unencumbered, it's not surprising that Fletch signed on the *Bounty*. When the ship entered the harbor at Tahiti, he must have felt as if he had died and gone to rake's heaven: hundreds of savage, bronzed teenage girls without whalebone corsets or a touch of cellulite were there, *anxious* to greet the sailors. It's hard to overstate the shock that this must have caused to the libido of Fletch. Those of us who spent our Wonder years with copies of *National Geographic* know that most of the natural beauties shown therein were, by and large, *very* large, the products of too much starchy poi or something. It was almost as if only chance brought an occasional native into the frame who didn't weigh in at 15 stone. *The Bounty* required no *Star Wars*-style special effects; the money must have been used for selecting and securing these lissome extras. Before this starts sounding like notes on mud wrestling, let me simply state that Fletch had arrived at a place in the late 18th century that a late-20th-century Club Med hasn't topped.

Lieutenant (yes, not Capt.) Bligh was a career naval man (who went to sea at age 12) and he had a wife. He had been to Tahiti before, so his blood pressure probably didn't rise quite as high as that of Fletch when the *Bounty* pulled in to the harbor. Bligh had a sense of duty: to his command, to his wife, and to what he —and many others of his time—perceived as his civilization (and all that it entails). The Bligh in *The Bounty* is not presented—at least not initially—as some sort of hard-nobbed stick in the mud, but as a man who has a sense of humor, an understanding of the weaknesses of the flesh, and an appreciation of a higher authority. While Fletch is out cavorting and going native Bligh is not organizing a one-man antilibertine league.

But the movie breaks down primarily because writer Bolt and director Donaldson are unable to come to grips with the fact that Bligh must have been motivated by and subservient to duty. Instead, implicit—overtly implicit, if something can be so—in the film is the idea that Bligh was driven to be nasty because of homosexual desires. As Fletch's fires blaze in the



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tropical sunshine, Bligh does a slow, superhot burn. We see Fletch and his belusted splashing in the Pacific, then a quick cut to Bligh in his cabin sweating, wearing a glazed look, while the electronic music pounds like something in a commercial for an analgesic. Then it's Fletch between the sheets . . . Bligh sweating and pounding . . . Fletch playing a percussion instrument while his babe struts her stuff . . . Bligh's cabin becomes more confining . . . and so on. Bligh is driven to taking what are presented as Caligulaian measures: he insists that shore leave end and that preparations are made to get underway. Then, abomination of abominations, he actually forces the men to resume their mission, which wouldn't have been all that bad, since the next stop was the Caribbean. It *seems* as if Bligh gave the odious orders because he desired Fletch, and lest the psychological disorder of Bligh is overlooked, the lieutenant begins having a filth fixation ( manifested by his demands that the decks be swabbed clean ), becomes what some paperback Freudians might call an anal-oriented personality. Admittedly, Fletch is shown as being somewhat out of sorts when he decides to take command of the *Bounty* in order to pick up where he left off with his bathing beauty, but his impulses are presented as being "natural" and therefore with-it, while Bligh's are "civilized" and consequently square, bogue, or whatever a sense of obligation was designated by the 18th-century coffeehouse cads. While *The Bounty* may, unlike its predecessors, be a blow for the name of Bligh, it is a backhanded blow that he takes on the chin. Manfully. □

## Notables

### *Of Skepticism, Saktism, and Sensualism*

For centuries the West has marveled at the sheer opulence of Far Eastern goods: the exotic spices, the rich silks, the intricate tapestries, and the fabulously carved woods, jades, and ivories. But, having once acquired its major religious traditions from the Westernmost of Asian lands, Westerners were unimpressed by the other Asian patterns of belief and conduct—Hindu, Islamic, Taoist, Confucian, Buddhist, and Shinto. Hence, while eagerly importing the material goods of the East, the West governed the consumption of those goods within a Judeo-Christian understanding not found in Asia, defining the temporal creation as a limited but real blessing, not an illusory maya, and inculcating a religious devotion in which the worshiper demonstrated love for God through service to fellow mortals, including unbelievers. Indeed, in return for the Orient's fabrics and fragrances, Westerners long did all they could to export not only their superior methods of industry and agriculture but also their approach to God, which they likewise regarded as incalculably superior.

However, for at least a century Western elites have offered little in return for Eastern fragrances and fabrics except technology and skepticism. Only this collapse of Western religion could have made the *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*, a richly textured 12th-century Persian poem filled with themes of doubt, hedonism, pessimism, and world-weariness, far more popular in Edward Fitzgerald's 1859 English translation than it ever was in original. Similarly, only a failure of Western faith could ever have given the sensual Arab-Oriental fiction of Salman Rushdie its phenomenally favorable reception among American and British sophisticates. In his latest work, *Shame* ( Alfred A. Knopf; New York ), Mr. Rushdie has followed in Fitzgerald-Khayyám's footsteps, as he himself announces in an early chapter. The name of his protagonist is Omar Khayyám Shakil, and two of his major themes are the Khayyamian ones of the nonexistence of God ( Islamic as well as Christian ) and the concomitant repudiation of all "puritanical" restraints upon sensual indulgence. But whereas the atheistic epicureanism of Fitzgerald-Khayyám was bitterly languid, Rushdie's wild, complex, and mesmerizing fantasy is informed by a deracinated sense of *Sharam*, "Shame," expressed through violent, destructive, and demonic energy, most fully personified in the fantastic, bloodthirsty woman-Beast who becomes Omar Khayyám's wife. This is Shiva without Vishnu. One hopes that Yeat's vision of a brutal monster "slouching toward Bethlehem to be born" was an empty prophecy, while a sensible observer can only be scornfully contemptuous of the many New York critics who are, without a rational sense of shame, now making straight the way before Rushdie's Beast. □

## Lightness & Lard

***Les Compères:* A film by Francis Veber; European International Distributors, Ltd.**

Perhaps it was in retaliation for those fried potatoes that are served up in little bags and cartons at McDonald's that they did it, that they performed an act which is so horribly outlandish. The French, those in question, have always been a very proud people; nowadays, the word *French* in English seems to be nothing more than a prefix for the word *fries*, and all because of the activities that go on below the golden arches that have sprouted up throughout the nominally civilized world. What an insult to a people who were once most concerned with linguistic purity. So, in response, it seems, the French recently awarded Jerry Lewis—comedian, actor, writer, director, and star of readily forgotten films including *Cinderfella*, *The Patsy*, and *Boeing Boeing*—the Legion of Honor. While the French, at least according to American news reports, genuinely admire Jerry, it is inconceivable that they are sincere; there must be a method to their madness. The extraordinarily high honor was, no doubt, bestowed on Jerry so that Americans would be *forced* to respect the man for his cinematic cutups, not simply his charitable ac-



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part of American policy in dealing with troubled Caribbean and Latin countries. But since 1934 an ominous new force has militantly made itself felt in the Western Hemisphere. The American army may not be the best instrument to make our neighbors into ideal parliamentary states, but without military measures it will be perilously difficult to prevent the Soviet Union from extracting the total subservience of yet more millions of people to communist imperialism. □

## WASTE OF MONEY

# Regressive Progress

**David Ritchie: *The Binary Brain: Artificial Intelligence in the Age of Electronics;*** Little, Brown; Boston.

**Barbara Bartholomew: *The Great Gradepoint Mystery;*** Macmillan; New York.

**Ian McMahan: *The Fox's Lair;*** Macmillan; New York.

One of the current "Taoist" physicists who is busy constructing grand unified nonsense for that portion of the thinking public that has nothing better to worry about wonders whether mountains aren't alive. Although it seems patently clear to any human being whose senses are in reasonable working order that a Rocky isn't a raccoon, said mystical Ph.D. posits that the lifespan of the geological mass is so enormous that a pitifully finite member of our species can't comprehend the life form. Maybe he's right; maybe all owners of pet rocks ought to retrieve them from the bottoms of their junk drawers and give those little guys a good airing. Once that mission of mercy is completed, they can begin to be concerned with the life that may be aborning in the memory of their local computer.

David Ritchie, in *The Binary Brain*, provides a PBS-style (i.e., a touch of information here, an anecdote there) examination of the ascent of man that he parallels with the development of computer technology. In some cases, the two overlap, as when he figures the human brain as "the wet computer." Ritchie is a wild-eyed proponent of technological progress; his enthusiasm is such that he can't even see that he is contradicting himself. For example, Ritchie is looking beyond the stage when there's bona fide artificial intelligence (AI), which seems to him to be right around the corner, to the not-too-distant time when there will be a sort of man-computer interface. Yet he quotes Dr. Nils Nilsson, a leading AI researcher at SRI International, as saying, "The press is implying that AI is much farther along than it really is. It's all very heady to read those articles, but I feel that we're not on the verge of all these wonders." It's headache-provoking to read books that consider with glee the prospect of having "biochip memory chips" stuck on the frontal lobe of one's brain.

What is unusual about the computer industry as compared with other industries is that it is dominated by people who are fairly young. John Sculley, president of Apple Computer, Inc., recently stated that the average age of an Apple employee is 28. Last year, entry to a computer software trade show called "Softcon" was restricted to those 21 or older; this year, the minimum age for visitors was 16. Noting the burgeoning crop of Cabbage Patch Computerites, Macmillan has launched a series of "Microkid Mysteries" (including *The Great Gradepoint Mystery* and *The Fox's Lair*) for 9 to 12-year-olds. One fears that the readers of these books will develop personalities that make Mr. Ritchie's seem stable. The young hero's best pal is ALEC—Access Linkage to Electronic Computer. ALEC was created as a result of a few mismatched circuits in a bank of computers. According to the stories, "ALEC had no existence except in those circuits, but he was no less real than that"; moreover, he is described as "a personality." The child turns on both family and friends by keeping quiet about ALEC; "He," the circuits, that is, "was terrified that someone would find out about him, try to study him, and accidentally wipe him out." So instead of teaching the readers about honesty and responsibility, the books teach subterfuge and the value of machines over human beings. It isn't hard to imagine such Microkids lining up for their "biochip memory chips." Makes one wonder about whether the Luddites were entirely wrong. □

# UFO Marxians

**Robert B. Everhart: *Reading, writing and resistance: Adolescence and labor in a junior high school;*** Routledge & Kegan Paul; Boston.

**Sidney L. Harring: *Policing a Class Society: The Experience of American Cities, 1865-1915;*** Rutgers University Press; New Brunswick; NJ.

**Bert Cochran: *Welfare Capitalism—and After;*** Schocken Books; New York.

Reportedly, when Galileo first used his telescope to challenge the prevailing Ptolemaic cosmology, some leading academicians simply refused to look through the new device. They did not need to, they said. They had already read Ptolemy and therefore knew what *should* be in the heavens. The reader gets the impression that similar theory-bound scholars are at work in these three books, written beneath the blinding spell of Marxist dogmas which are as empirically indefensible in 1984 as the theory of the crystalline spheres was in 1632. The course of modern world history has been remarkably cruel to Marx's prophecies concerning the course of class warfare and the inevitable emergence of proletarian paradises. Indeed, Marxists can hardly decide which is more embarrassing: the persistent vitality of capitalism in the West or the doleful failure of communism in the East. So Marxism remains a theory in search of an incarnation, its advocates desperately scrambling in search of an obscure fact or two to tack on to their faith and averting their eyes from the obvious contradictions on every hand.

*Reading, writing and resistance* illustrates to just what absurd lengths Marxists are driven to find supportive data. Here the learned Marxist professor Robert Everhart implausibly argues that such junior high activities as "goofing off" and "bugging the teacher" constitute significant manifestations of "the estranged nature of labor" in contemporary "capitalist society." Spitwad-throwers of the world, unite.

Less juvenile but not much less absurd is Sidney L. Harring's contention in *Policing a Class*



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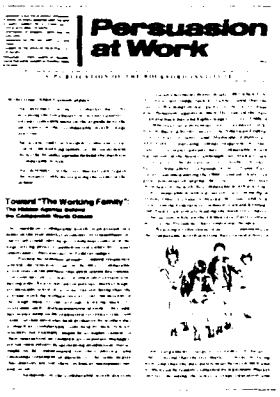


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*Society* that police forces originated as bourgeois tools to keep the working class in line. Professor Harring's evidence on the class implications of police strike-breaking at the turn of the century have some credibility. But no serious reader can believe him when he posits that contemporary American police enjoy widespread legitimacy among the working class only because of "law-and-order salesmanship" by "the bourgeois mass media," that the American society that police protect is "inherently unjust," and that the apparently pacific police function is really "violent at its core" because policemen have the "*capacity* for force." Exactly what Harring would probably say about Soviet and Nicaraguan parades of "capacity for force" is another matter.

Bert Cochran tries to distance himself in *Welfare Capitalism—and After* from the "unilinear" vision of "the historical sections of the *Manifesto* and of *Capital*." But his Marxian bias is unmistakable in his effort to blame the current economic problems of the Western welfare states on their independent capitalists and on their failure to accept "the growing need of state ownership" of major industries. This thesis, Cochran admits, is politically difficult to advance in a world well aware of the dismal performance of Soviet and Eastern European economies. Finding the best concrete example of what he envisions for the West in "the Yugoslavian system," he ruefully admits that even there unemployment, inflation, and emigration leave "much to be desired." Not to worry. State ownership will finally be done *right* in America in the next 50 years or so when a "Great Transformation" sweeps a far-visioned "quasi-revolutionary regime" into power. To put a new turn on one of Samuel Johnson's aphorisms, the unspecified future is the last refuge of a Marxist. ☐




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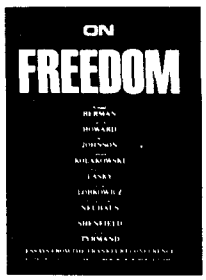


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## THE AMERICAN PROSCENIUM

### *Roll Out Ferraro . . .*

At the beginning of the 1940's, the Andrew Sisters sang:

> Roll out the barrel
> Let's have a barrel of fun
> Roll out the barrel
> Let's get the blues on the run . . .

Will the Democrats, or perhaps even the country, now have the promised fun? A furtive look at Ms. Ferraro seemed not to confirm such hopes: she is a radical feminist, constantly and effusively smooched on TV-reports by an Abzug, a Steinem, or suchlikes. A first glimpse at her physique gives an impression of a vivacious, outgoing, energetic blonde, a woman-executive of the Gimbels rather than Bloomingdale style. However, a closer look at her face reveals more: one need not be a seasoned phrenologist to discover there a sort of lockjawed determination that makes a pursuit of goals exempt from any subtler moral or intellectual deliberations. We do not predict too much fun for whoever is going to be Ms. Ferraro's partner, antagonist, or even adviser. As far as chasing away the blues from the soul of the Democratic Party is concerned, her undeniably historical nomination has yet to prove its merits.

Incoherence reigns supreme. Although her extreme feminist allegiances are on the public record, Ms. Ferraro stormed on the national political scene under the banner of ardent patriotism, family values, and hard work ethic as the primary ingredients of an American success story. However, within our, perhaps, insufficient knowledge feminist faith is intimately associated with internationalism and ultracosmopolitan sisterhood, and with a depersonalization of gender that makes the family the object of weird, if not caricatural, deformations. As to the elevation-through-hardship legend, Ms. Ferraro is a millionaire thanks to the skills of her husband, a real estate entrepreneur. He was so successful in endowing her with the means to pursue her career that—according to *Chicago Tribune*—she could not, till now, come up with any proper explanations of some apparent financial inconsistencies in her background. For similar inconsistencies, someone like Mr. Edward Meese would be publicly crucified at the Dupont Circle and left there to rot until the election day—a horrid example of the alleged Republican sleaze factor. How well her wealth sits next to her welfarist compassion in her conscience has never been disclosed, but one thing is clear: ambivalence seems not to impinge on her self-promotion and self-image. She does not bother to enlighten us how an ultraliberal feminist ended up as an artifact of the ruthlessly macho Democratic Party machine of Queens and, later, in the House's corridors of factional intrigue. All we know is that if Cousin Nick were not there, we might not have had a female vice-presidential candidate in 1984. For, in keeping with the best traditions of ethnic big city politics, it was the Democratic Queens District Attorney, one Nicholas Ferraro, who provided the then Mrs. Zaccaro with a job as a prosecutor, the starting point of her political ascension. And that's the way it is.

The day after Mr. Mondale announced his selection of the running mate, a Chicago TV reporter sampled reactions in the streets. A man asked how he feels about Geraldine Ferraro said: "Who is he?" "He" was, obviously, the victory of the left-wing National Organization of Women, who enforced Ms. Ferraro upon Mr. Mondale, and who claims to represent American women. The mere fact that NOW has the membership of 250,000 but that there are 91 million women voters in America was hardly mentioned in the press, during the Democratic Convention, and on the campaign trail. Power-seeking manipulation will prevail over everything. The Democratic Party is going down in history as the party that has nominated Ferraro—for better or worse. And as a party with a standard-bearer who seems to be eager to become a president on the coattail of a petticoat—even if that garment has transmogrified into a pantsuit. □

### *The Lenkowsky Affair*

Mr. Leslie Lenkowsky, acting deputy director of the U.S. Information Agency (and a *Chronicles of Culture* contributor) was recently brought to trial in the kangaroo court of the liberal media. His crime, or sin, according to the oligarchs of the liberal cultural dominance (oppression?): he "blacklisted" liberal pundits, prevented their having speaking engagements abroad. The intellectual excursions in question are financed by the American taxpayer and are supposed to represent American culture in the eyes of the world.

Under Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, Ford, and, of course, Carter, anyone selected to represent us intellectually *had* to have the cachet of the New York-Washington, D.C. liberal establishment. Only when one's name was familiar with the readers of *New York Times*, *New York Review of Books*, or the *New Yorker*, was one fit to stand for the American thought and conscience in Paris, Stockholm, Djakarta, or Melbourne—not to mention Moscow, Warsaw, or Helsinki. The deeply entrenched bureaucracy that ruled the U.S. Information Agency (with that or another title) during the past two decades extracted its *only* admissible, exportable image of the American culture from *The Atlantic*, *Saturday Review*, *Vogue*, *The Nation*, and the lists of Pulitzer Prize winners. Schlesingers, Vonneguts, Updikes, and the like were revered and adored as beacons of our spiritual worth; in recent years, they were reinforced by an occasional feminist or a nature worshipper. Russell Kirks, Robert Nisbets, Irving Kristols needed not apply. All Mr. Lenkowsky tried to do, as President Reagan's legitimate appointee, was to



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tivities. After all, if those in the land of Derrida and Foucault say something is so, is it not?

The reason I suspect a quasi-diplomatic fast one in the case of M. Lewis is *Les Compéres*, a light comedy of modern manners (what there are left of them) by Francis Veber. Lewis is certainly the doyen of contemporary American cinematic comedians; his broad farcical, slapstick, and buffoon-like activities are aped by the Steve Martins and Chevy Chases. Belushi would have been just another overweight fallguy if Lewis hadn't blazed a path with a flamethrower through the film vaults full of intelligent comedy (e.g., *Horse Feathers* is an intelligent comedy: hilarious without being stupid; *The Nutty Professor* is simply a crime against taste). *Les Compéres*, the plot of which is drafted in such a way that the comedic elements could be excised yet a sensible feature would remain, evokes a queasy feeling when it is thought of with regard to Hollywood. To be sure, this is not Molière, yet at least this tale of two could-be fathers in search of the teenaged boy who could be the son of either (part of the comedy turns on each man's belief that *he's* the sire, particularly since they are emotionally and ideologically different, yet neither is a cartoon-like bigot a la virtually all the characters in the works of Mel Brooks) seems as if it was created by a man who is cognizant of the fact that there once was a Molière. Americans, on the other hand, are stuck with comedies that are inspired by a stumbling and giggling human whoopie cushion. □

## ART

# Balthus

**by Shehbaz H. Safrani**

***Balthus: A Retrospective,*** an exhibition representing a half century (1930-1980) of the contemporary French artist Balthus (Balthazar Klossowski of Rola), closed in May at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art. It consisted of some 50 paintings and 60 drawings. Included in the show were illustrations for Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1933), in which Balthus identified himself with Heathcliff.

This first extensive survey of Balthus's work to be held in the United States presented his recurring subject themes: the reveries and mysteries of adolescence, the female nude, portraits, players of cards, still lifes, large urban scenes, and panoramic landscapes. Paintings had been lent from collections in Europe, Australia, Mexico, and the United States. Since many of his works remain privately owned, the exhibition provided a unique opportunity to view Balthus's art.

The paintings are mostly realist-figurative, with roots reaching back to the frescoes of Piero della Francesca. Whether Balthus is a seminal painter can be argued. At a time when neo-Expressionist trends have arrived with a gale force in New York, Balthus received overwhelming attention. "Balthus is distinctly the man of the hour," wrote John Russell of *The New York Times*. In 1977, Balthus's one-man show at the Pierre Matisse Gallery in New York was mobbed. His works are sold, on the average between $500,000 and $800,000. They seldom appear at auction, although one did recently in London and fetched close to $1 million. Whatever may be said about the private life of Balthus, something he guards as closely as Greta Garbo, his paintings have an enigmatic power which is hard to escape. The majority of his work is structured around young females—girls, in fact, on the threshold of puberty, or having just crossed it. No gardeners with ladies here, for Balthus has moved beyond the Lawrentian syndrome of sex. Balthus's eroticized fantasies are so thoroughly worked out, so astutely studied and crafted with such daring compositions, that they seem utterly real. His interiors are not so Parisian as Jamesian—an easy casualness about the place, the adults out of town and the young together at last. Indeed Balthus's paintings of young women are so suggestive that few past and contemporary painters approach his extraordinary skills. Actual physical touching is often very limited. Balthus never shows a drop of blood, as Munch did with his paintings of pubescent girls. The sexual and sensuous, even lustful, aspects are manifested with immense subtlety that is at the same time equally decadent.

Most of Balthus's work leaves much more to the imagination than average works of art. The most powerful of his paintings, "The Guitar Lesson" of 1934 was safely excluded from the New York retrospective. There are two women in this painting. The older, the instructor, has bent her pupil backwards, revealing the student's nude body from the waist down. The student's hair is clutched by the teacher's right hand. The instructor's blouse is loose, her right breast is showing. An intimation of satisfaction can be discerned from the female faces. Whether the teacher is taking advantage of youth, or the two have consented to play with each other, is unanswered. The lesson, for sure, has been interrupted and the guitar lies idle on the foreground. A milder 1949 "Study After The Guitar Lesson," shown in New York, replaced the female instructor with a male, whose left hand held the student's knee and with his right, he held her wrist—a far cry from the enigmatic 1934 painting.

Themes similar to "The Guitar Lesson" occur frequently in Balthus, though none is so shocking. Freudian or not, very young women seem to be the painter's obsession. The distinguished poet Rainer Maria Rilke, who had patronized Balthus, wrote in 1921 that "Balthus will remain in his dream and he will

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transform all reality to suit his creative needs." A year later, while merely 14, Balthus confided to a friend that he wished "to remain a child forever." This Peter Pan ideal rarely surfaced in sheer innocence. We have no definite proof as to why Balthus is obsessed with young pubescent females. "The Golden Days," painted in 1944-45 depicts another interior scene. A young woman with one breast exposed lounges on a chair. There is a half-dressed man, her lover perhaps, with his back to the viewer, tend[illegible] to an active fireplace.

Balthus was born in Paris in 1908 and now lives with his second wife and their little daughter in a Swiss village. He is Polish by descent, but remains the quintessential European. Judging from his self-portraits and recent photographs, Balthus is a thin man, with an intellectual air about his angular face, with deep-set eyes and a melancholic expression. But his artwork reveals an entirely different person. De Gaulle's cultural minister André Malraux, another Balthus friend, appointed him director of the French Academy in Rome. Balthus restored the Villa Medici and its gardens, located close to the Spanish Steps in Rome. There, for five years he also kept his young Japanese mistress, who served as a model in several key paintings. From his first marriage Balthus had two sons. Eventually Balthus married Setsuko Ideta in 1967. He served as director until 1977. At that time, he moved to Switzerland. The paintings Setsuko Ideta figured in, "The Turkish Room," "Japanese Figure with a Black Mirror," and "Japanese Figure with a Red Table," all of the 1960's, are first-rate works. Balthus recycled nothing from the Japanese prints of the floating world, the *Ukiyo-e*. Yet, almost a century after the post-Impressionists had exhausted *Japonisme*, Balthus dared to undertake the same theme. The female figure is extended parallel to the picture plane, the paintings constructed with rectangular spaces, hinting rather than aping Japanese sensuousness.

Portraiture is another strength of Balthus. His best portrait is of Joan Miro and his daughter Dolores painted in 1937-38. The late Spanish surrealist impeccably dressed is shown seated with his daughter standing near him—the picture of paternal love. In portraits like those of Derain, the Fauvist, Balthus returns swiftly to the erotic elements by showing a young female dressing in the background. The issue is forced upon viewers: is the scene depicted before or after the conjugal act?

More than anything, Balthus is a man of forceful ideas, a person familiar with executing them in paintings that can hypnotize a viewer. Because he has mastered his painting technique and handles compositions with great invention, the salient eroticism of his work is the prime example of timeless artistic sublimation, so rare in our era of pointless explicitness. □

# Notables

### *Time Bomb*

Works of popular fiction bearing an ideological message are not rare; thrillers, science fiction, historical set pieces—these and other genres are often full of some loaded freight, though the persuasion, or call it *propaganda*, is often subtle, implicit. Perhaps the senses of the reading public have been dulled, blunted, or anesthetized by the constant barrage of newspapers, magazines, books, newsletters, flyers, radio broadcasts, TV shows, movies, billboards, bumper stickers, and all of the other signals and codes that are almost always experienced during waking hours. This assumption is the only thing that can give a clue as to why *Warday* by Whitley Strieber and James Kunetka (Holt, Rinehart and Winston: New York) is being pushed at bookstores and through the services of the Book of the Month Club; it is a bad and bald example of anti-American propaganda. Here's World War III, the battle of the titans, the authors say, the war between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. It happens on October 28, 1988, so the telling is as fresh as extrapolated headlines from today can make it. More, a sense of verisimilitude is added by the authors' use of their own names as narrators and their folding in of "documentary evidence." Strieber is the author of horror stories (e.g., *The Wolfen* and *The Hunger*) and Kunetka writes about technology (e.g. *City of Fire: Los Alamos and the Atomic Age, 1943-1945*); they make maximum use of these angles in *Warday*.

There are two questions that must be raised. First: Who started the war? They did. Second: Who is to blame? We are. Naturally. The U.S. puts up a piece of what is now known as the "Star Wars" *defense* system; the Soviets, being technologically behind, are shook and so immediately push the button. Still, Strieber and Kunetka find the Americans to be at fault. Their conclusion is as follows:

> It is eerie to remember the bitter hatred I felt against the Russians when they shot down that Korean airliner in '83, or after the Kabul firebombing in '85. Those brutal acts seemed the work of pride, but time and experience have revealed that they were the fearful doings of the trapped. I wish we could reach back through time and heal our relationship. And how would we have done it? The Soviets were punished without surcease for the whole seventy years of their existence. It would have been a remarkable adventure to give up our punitive habits and try to view them as one does a friend who has fallen from the grace of accepted ways.

The self-recriminating breast-beating is blatant. After more than 350 pages of death, destruction, and disaster, the reader is meant to be in a state of "Well, maybe we should have—or *should*." The rhetoric on another, less obvious, level is more insidious. It figures the Soviet bear as a long-prodded teddy bear (e.g., "the trapped," "punished without surcease," "a friend"). Certainly, no one in this country wants war. But should the line of *Warday* be accepted, then one day a history entitled *Forfeitday* will be written. □



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look into the matter of the skewed speakers in pursuit of some primary justice, or, at least, evenhandedness. This earned him the ferocious wrath of the liberal press and the tag of a "blacklister." Thus, even though he was not clever, underhanded, or prevaricative enough to accomplish his mission, he was, nevertheless, perfectly honorable in his intentions.

The rabid press outcry induced a special hearing of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, which ultimately axed Mr. Lenkowsky. His chief executioner: Sen. Charles Percy, the man who promotes himself to Illinois voters as a statesman of mature decency and reflective insight. We wonder whether those who oppose his reelection under the slogan "Anyone but Percy!" are so wrong after all. □


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## JOURNALISM

### Warm Feelings & Fairness

These are conflicting notions: warm feelings, no matter from which spiritual or emotional fount they emanate, must end in a bit of unfairness. The only human construct that firmly believes in and widely proclaims its ability to be exempted from this rule is, of course, the *New York Times*. For many years, the *Times* succeeded in convincing America, and—what's worse—the world, of its impartial integrity—a journalistic quality far above distorting or obscuring political and ideological passions and desires. But it was enough to open one of the June issues of the *New York Times Magazine* to get an intimation of how much more complex is the truth about that venerated organ's impartiality. There one could find a long item entitled "Voices from the Left" featuring a dialogue between Messrs. Michael Harrington and Irving Howe. The printed conversation is conducted in a playful, relaxed tone, with carefully crafted avoidance of any political shrillness, rabid sloganeering, or intolerant tabooism, so characteristic of *any* Left *anywhere*.

Now, there's nothing wrong with featuring Mr. Harrington and Prof. Howe, both prominent and respectable beacons of the slightly tempered socio-political radicalism—although Mr. Harrington is not always above some intellectual trickery, as Prof. Sowell, the noted scholar, has recently documented it in the *New Republic*. What's disturbing is the obvious corollary of that piece, especially as cast against the realities of the contemporary American sociocultural scene. Why does the *Times* permit only the voices of the left to sound so clearly and with such a benign, somehow approving accompaniment of supportive journalistic paraphernalia? Would the *Times* ever stage in its pages an equally spectacular exchange between Professors Robert Nisbet and Irving Kristol, who are the intellectual counterparts of Messrs. Harrington and Howe on the other side of the ideological barricade? Would it accord space to a conversation between Mr. Paul Weyrich and the Rev. Jerry Falwell who in the current political topography in America are *politically* as far to the right of the center (that the *Times* confidently proclaims itself to occupy) as Messrs. Howe and Harrington are to the left?

No easy answers to these questions except, perhaps, that more or less unwittingly, the *Times* seems still to subscribe to that old incantation, invented by Stalinist Comintern, that goes: "No enemy on the left!"—which constituted the dialectical base for all Popular Fronts of the 1930's, and still lingers in the editorial offices of *Le Monde*, *The Guardian*, and the *Times* itself, like a melancholic song from *Casablanca*. The *Times*, maybe even in good conscience, calls "The Voices from the Left" information—that is its journalistic duty, or mission. It certainly would be if other people with other views received the same treatment in *voicing* their opinions. As they don't, the *Times*' practice is not information but promotion. And it's still vaunted by the *Times* as impartiality. □



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# What are conservatives saying about Sex and God in American Politics?

"I didn't realize that this country's atheists and agnostics had such fragile character that the mere mention of God might cause them grave distress. I am sorry that the country's atheists are such wimps."

-R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr.

"These 13- and 14-year olds need to be encouraged to keep their knees together until they grow up and find husbands."

-Midge Decter

"I believe that homosexuals should be afforded total civil rights like all other Americans."

-Reverend Jerry Falwell

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# A Prudent Progressive

*Leopold Tyrmand*

Do people still rely on the credibility of Prince Bakunin? If they do, this surely must attest to the incurability of the Western civilization's decline, to its perennial susceptibility to decay through murky and invincible diseases of perception and intelligence. It somehow makes us incline toward a Darwinian concept of justice: a civilization that has become so cerebrally weak deserves to perish. Prince Bakunin, a mid-19th-century Russian aristocrat, was the spiritual father of anarchism; if he lived today, of course, with his upper-upper-class bearings, wealth, and wacky ideas, he would be most welcome to the pages of *Vogue*, *Vanity Fair*, and *WWD*. The cheapness and triteness now promulgated by those magazines were fully anticipated in his social messages: the new man, unmoored from responsibility and duty, will usher in the freest society in history; in the meantime, before the Eden *à la Russe* is achieved, let's bomb, mutilate, terrorize, kill; when utopia is finally reached, anyone with a hankering for commitment, obligation, order, and the logic of social priorities, will be dutifully executed. The paltriness of these concepts make them look, from today's perspective, like the goods from an intellectual nickel-and-dime store, shoddy merchandise in view of what we *today* know about man, world, society, and our communitarian instincts. Yet his Woolworth-brand social romanticism is now widely merchandised in the capitalist West, though scorned in communist Russia. When looked upon with an eye unbeclouded by faddish frenzy, Bakunin's social intuition seems as totally unfit for consideration by the rational consciousness in our times as a kerosene lamp is unfit for illuminating word-processor screens.

But in chi-chi, artsy-artsy, mentally incoherent, morally vicious movies that try to concoct the ethics of modern terrorism, Prince Bakunin's name is melodiously invoked as proof of a protagonist's erudition, or his lofty social emotionalism. He remains apparently a source of mental nourishment for minds warped by zealotry, for brains whose tissues are eaten away by messy hatreds and devoid of the humility of thinking. One Werner Fassbinder, a West German film director, an idol of the New York premiere crowd, now deceased at the age of incipient manhood (probably a victim of drugs, obesity, and incongruence of artistic passions), didn't go to his grave before creating a motion picture entitled *Lola*, which, not long ago, put the New York film critics into spasms of rapture. The movie's philosophical texture is a lamely updated Brecht and clumsily imitated Durrenmatt; its abysmally profound message says that life in capitalism, especially in West Germany during the early 50's, was corrupt. To prove the correctness of his vision, the late Mr. Fassbinder portrays those who try to be honest as idiots, and those who see clearly as wimps.

Now, it's not easy to preach any kind of collectivism—Marxian or anarchic—in the West Germany of post-Konrad Adenauer's *Wirtschaftswunder*. In spite of Mr. Fassbinder's exertions, any commonsensical viewer must come to a conclusion that the only decent, humane, and warmhearted character in his movie is the entrepreneur, a type of person that Mr. Fassbinder paints as utterly wicked, ruthless, and swinish because of his efforts to save fools from their foolishness, to be charitable to wimps, and to engineer upward mobility for fallen women without sanctimoniously exorcising their inborn depravity. At a time when one-third of the East German population tried to escape by any possible means from angelic Marxist-Leninism to the hellish moral morass of a capitalistic democracy—where free enterprise offered such miseries as freedom, dignity, and economic well-being to anyone who wished to escape—to claim simply that communism was a better proposition than capitalism amounted to an insult to human intelligence. It's in providing a radical, ahistorical third option that Prince Bakunin's thought becomes Mr. Fassbinder's moral compass.

Bakunin laid down the gospel of modern anarchism according to which *any* morality is a bourgeois superstition. His final bequest to our time is the drugged, psychotic murderer who takes innocent human lives at random, in fits of ideological epilepsy, propelled by the most repulsive of all modern sins: political fanaticism. As a result, a cult of despicable cruelty flourishes on the left in the entire world. In the late 20th century, Bakunin's ultimate product is Carlos, the KGB hitman, the PLO slayer of children, the Red Brigade's cowardly executioner, the IRA exterminator of hapless passersby. In Germany, his progeny are the Meinhof-Baader humanoids who worship bloody insanity as the higher degree of humanness. Are they the answer Mr. Fassbinder proposes to the "corruption" of entrepreneurship? Do the New York critics pay any attention to the correlation of ideas and impulses in a movie? Does a civilization that bestows success, fame, money, and the title of artist on countless Fassbinders between Sunset Boulevard and Berlin deserve to survive? □

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